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THROUGH A NEEDLE'S EYE

BY

HESBA STRETTON

AUTHOR OF "JESSICA'S FIRST PRAYER," ETC.

IN TWO VOLUMES

VOL. II.




C. KEGAN PAUL & Co., 1, PATERNOSTER SQUARE

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THROUGH A NEEDLE'S EYE.

CHAPTER I

IN HERFORD CHURCH.

THOUGH the atmosphere of Herford was charged with electricity, and every one else was conscious of it, Mr. Cunliffe continued to breathe the calm air of devout abstraction. It had been settled that he should take a brief holiday after Justin's return from London, and he left home early the next week, surprised and disappointed at his wife's steady refusal to accompany him. Mrs. Cunliffe could not think of quitting Herford whilst a storm was hanging over it, which might sweep away her own welfare in its swift career.

From the time that Justin had given up the living, it had been his practice to take his friend's duty in his

absence. As soon as the office ceased to be compulsory it became a pleasure to him. He had a sense of solemn enjoyment in standing up among his own people, and leading their prayers, like the princes of old, who were also the priests of their subjects. The villagers on their part, liked to look up occasionally to Master Justin in the pulpit ; though on the whole they were inclined to be more critical of his sermons than of their vicar's. " Master Cunliffe's head has got only one thing inside it," they were wont to say, " but Master Justin's got fifty. We cannot look for as much from him." Justin knew quite well their estimate of his ministrations ; but he knew also they enjoyed them as much as he did. He could not be jealous of his friend's superiority on his own ground.


There was a great concourse of curious people the Sunday of Mr. Cunliffe's absence. What brought some of them there, they could not tell themselves. Mr. Watson had driven over from Lowborough. Leah Durt had walked along the cliffs from Rillage ; and still more strange, Diana Lynn had come, and was seated beside Pansy in the Court pew. The crowded congregation filling every nook of the little church struck

Justin with an unusual sense of awe. There was scarcely a strange face among them ; but he felt as if it would have been an easy task to face strangers in the stead of these neighbours and dependants, looking up at him with their keen and eager gaze. Their thoughts had been occupied on the same topic as his own. They had been trying him, and sitting in judgment upon him ; though as yet their verdict was in suspense. It required a great effort to steady his voice and read the old familiar words.

An ever-growing gloom and heaviness of spirit oppressed him. He feared that it must make itself heard in the tones of his voice, and visible in the expression of his face. He struggled to get the mastery over himself, and he partly succeeded. But who was he, that he should seem thus to stand between God and man ? Why should his voice, rather than any other, be lifted up in the solemn accents of prayer ? All the week he had been in conflict on the battle-field of the world ; walking by the world's light, and reasoning by the world's wisdom. There was many a man there better fitted to lift up his unfettered hands, in quiet trust, to God.

Then there rushed through his mind the recollection that he had once filled this place, and quitted it, to go up, as he thought, to one higher. He had ceased to be the vicar of Herford in order to become its master. The broad acres, with their promising outlets into worldly prosperity, had seemed better to him, more worthy of his powers, than the charge of these poor peasant souls. It was true he had given to them a better pastor than he had been himself. Yet all the same, his own choice had been the owning of lands, and the possession of influence and reputation, and the good things of this life. He had deluded himself with the fancy that he was serving God. He had in fact been serving Mammon.


How he got through the service, and the sermon that followed it, he could not tell. All the faces below him blended into a confused mass, as he repeated mechanically the words that his eye fell upon. He felt glad when it was over to take refuge in the vestry, and sit there in a blank stupor. The old sexton came in, when the congregation had dispersed, but he bade him go, and leave the key in the church door. Pansy tapped at the window, and his eyes were lifted to her sweet face,



looking in upon him through the dim panes ; but he only shook his head at her invitation to walk up the cliff with her and Diana. How quickly would he cut the knot he could not untie, but for Diana and Pansy ! How joyfully would he go back to his old despised post of Vicar of Herford, could he but blot out these last few years !

The bells did not ring for afternoon service ; and the news ran from lip to lip that Master Justin was not well enough to do the vicar's duty again. Such a circumstance had never occurred before, and it seemed as astonishing and portentous as an eclipse of the sun. Moreover, he was remaining alone in the vestry, with the door locked inside. Mr. Cunliffe was known to indulge in long spells of meditation and prayer inside the church, with the key turned to prevent intrusion. But Master Justin was altogether a different personage. There must be something amiss.

A large number of strangers had come again for the afternoon prayers ; and there was a good deal of visiting of neighbours in consequence. The early tea-tables of the village were crowded. There was much guessing going on, and a fine thrill almost of terror.




Could it be true, as Leah Dart had said, that Master Dick was going to law to turn out his elder brother? And did Master Justin feel somehow that he was in the wrong? Why could they not share and share alike? If they went to law they would lose all their money no doubt; and what would become of Herford then? It was quite clear, in any case, that something most be going to happen.

The day was still warm and bright at seven o'clock, the hour for old Fosse's meeting. There were more people than usual wending their way along the rocky pathway on the Lantern-hill, for they eagerly needed a centre for meeting, and old Fosse was sure of having some very clear opinions of his own. Leah Dart had been spending the day with her mother, who made her appearance with her, feeling that once a year it was incumbent upon her to pay her duty to the Almighty, by listening to a few good words; and she preferred old Fosse's good words to Mr. Cunliffe's more regular and more cultivated ministrations. Mrs. Fosse locked up her straying poultry, and went with her husband to the lighthouse. The ancient chapel was as full as it had been in the days when the most popular preaching

friar had called his congregation together, by the tinkling of the bell in the low square belfry. Jeremy took up his post on the threshold, as being the most convenient spot from which to address his hearers, and from which he commanded a view of the rocky path leading up to the lighthouse.


It was a little after seven in the evening when Justin left the church, and was seen by many inquisitive eyes to saunter down to the beach slowly and languidly. He turned mechanically to the path up the Lantern-hill. It had been a favourite haunt of his since his early boyhood. The little tongue of rock stretching out into the water was ordinarily quiet and deserted, and from the far end all view of the village was cut off, and there was nothing to be seen except cliff and sea. Justin had forgotten it was Sunday evening. He was so absorbed in the conflict still raging within him that he could not give a thought either to the time or place. He was going on, like a man deaf and blind, who is led by some friendly hand which has grown so familiar that he hardly feels its clasp. It was here he had come the night old Herford died, and he was coming again, half-unconsciously, to knit up the ravelled



memories of the past. But as he came, below the lighthouse, he was startled out of his reverie by the sound of voices.


Old Fosse's sunburnt face and silvery head stood out clearly against the grey and weather-stained stones of the ancient porch. There was an expression of placid happiness upon his face. He saw Justin at the foot of the steep rocky staircase, and he beckoned to him to come up with a gesture of welcome, though he did not pause in giving out the hymn that was about to be sung by the congregation within. Justin could distinguish a crowd of men and women in comparative darkness within the lighthouse, swaying to and fro with the energy in which they put their whole strength of voice into the singing. It was the custom still in that remote country place for two lines, or half a verse, to be read out aloud by the preacher, and sung by the people, producing a quaint alternation of full-toned singing and quiet speech. Fosse was reading in rapturous tones, as Justin mounted the steps—

“ No foot of land do I possess ;
No dwelling in the wilderness ;
A poor wayfaring man ! ”



Whilst these lines were being sung, with many an old-fashioned quaver, he offered half his book to Justin, as he had often done, when the master of Herford had been a boy, before he had gone to college and taken orders. The memory of those days brought a smile to his worn face, as he took his place beside old Fosse. The heart of the old fisherman glowed with delight. Master Justin was as dear to him as his own son could have been, and he felt no embarrassment at the idea of preaching before him. When Fosse was preaching, no thought of himself could intrude. He spoke to his little congregation as he would have talked to each man singly, if he had been sitting beside him on the rude bench under the lighthouse wall. Now, as Justin sat just within the porch, old Fosse stood on the threshold, and with his white head thrown back, and his every feature bright with inward gladness, he prepared to address his uneducated audience.

There had been a slight stir and commotion amongst the people at sight of Justin, but it quickly subsided into decorous tranquillity, and the pleasant, cheery tones of old Fosse broke the silence.




CHAPTER II.

OLD FOSSE'S SERMON.

AND when Jesus saw that He was very sorrowful, and said, How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God! For it is easier for a camel to go through a needle's eye, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God!"


"Jesus was very sorrowful when he saw that! What do you s'pose he saw? The poor widow that had only a mite, all the livin' she had, and she put that into the treasury box? Or the blind beggars, poor men! sittin' by the roadside beggin'? Or that sick woman, which had suffered many things of many physicians, and spent all she had, and was nothin' bettered, but rather grew worse? Or did he look into that bag Judas took care of, which was so often empty? Or was he thinkin' of his own disciples, that had neither silver nor brass in their purses? P'rhaps, if we'd been set to guess, we



should have guessed any of these. Or we might have guessed. He was thinkin' how lonesome He was, and how far from His Father and His Father's house. Jesus was very sorrowful, but it was for none of these things. He had just seen a rich man !


“ Ah ! the dear Lord was thinkin' about rich men ! A minute before he felt so sorrowful, one o' them had come to Him, very eager to learn how to win eternal life. He was a young man, a ruler, with plenty of power, and I dare say he ruled over his folks quite well and justly, better than most men, p'raps. There's not a word said against him by anybody. We know he wasn't too much set up by bein' a ruler ; for he comes runnin' to Jesus, and kneelin' down to him in the way. Ay ! kneelin' in the sight of all th' crowd, and on the dusty road, just like the poor leper that once came to Jesus, beseechin' Him, and kneelin' down to Him, and sayin' unto Him, ' If Thou wilt, Thou canst make me clean.' No, no ; he didn't give himself airs, though he was a ruler, and a rich man. He knew Jesus could tell him how to win eternal life ; and he was not too grand to kneel down for such a blessin' as that.

“ Ay ! and Jesus beholdin' him, loved him. Loved




him; think of that! Jesus loves us, every one, thank God! But maybe there was somethin' very special about this young man, that made him very pleasant in the Lord's eyes. We all know what it is to see some kind sweet face, like our Miss Pansy's, God bless her! and we love it all in a moment, without stoppin' to think why. We know Jesus loved His disciple John, and chose him to sit beside Him at supper, and let him rest his head upon His bosom. And he loved this young ruler. Poor rich young man! He might have had the Lord Jesus Christ for bosom friend; he might have lived with Him, hearkenin' every day to His blessed words, and lookin' upon His blessed face, and feelin' the clasp of His hand. But he missed it all; poor fellow! poor fellow!

“‘What lack I yet?’ he asked. He felt he wanted somethin', though he was so rich he had everythin'—save eternal life. That was what he lacked—eternal life. An awful thing to miss that is, either in this world or the world to come. What is eternal life? Why! the Bible tells us plain. ‘This is eternal life, to know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent.’ The poor young man had kept




all the commandments, but he did not know God yet, nor Jesus, who had come to make God known. But he felt he was lackin' somethin'. 'Come, know me!' said Jesus. 'Take up thy cross and follow me, for that is the only way to eternal life. You shall live with me, like these poor men, my disciples; and I will teach you about my Father, till you know Him and me. You can only know the Father through me!' What! was there no other way for him to win eternal life? Must he give up his rulership and his possessions?—great possessions they were. Could he have no treasure except treasure in heaven? Then the rich man went away, grieved, and very sorrowful.


"I don't wonder at the Lord bein' very sorrowful too. Poor folks came, and could get all they wanted from Him. Sick folks were healed, and blind folks received their sight. Sad folks were comforted. Even lepers, and folks possessed with devils were set free. But when rich folks came the Lord could do nothin' for them. They had got all they wanted, except eternal life. Except eternal life, mark you! and they were too rich to win that, in the only way it can be won. He may well be very sorrowful, when He looks at rich men.



“ ‘It’s easier,’ said Jesus, very sorrowfully, ‘for a camel to go through a needle’s eye, than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.’ ‘Well! that’s impossible!’ say the disciples; and they were astonished out of measure. They were never so astonished as at that. They were exceedingly amazed. Even when Jesus told them beforehand of the manner of His death, they were not so amazed and astonished out o’ measure. ‘Who can be saved if a rich man cannot?’ they asked; ‘a rich man has everythin’ his own way. He’s a ruler, and everybody gives way to him. He’s plenty of time, there’s nothin’ to hinder him from keepin’ the commandments from his youth up. He can give loads o’ money away, and nobody blames him. Who, then, can be saved?’ Ah! they never thought the kingdom o’ heaven is as men runnin’ a race; and who can run well that is laden with thick clay? If a man is passin’ over clayey ground, and he clogs his own feet with it, how is he to win a race? He was a young man, and nimble enough to run along the high-road to meet with Jesus, but his soul was heavy laden with the pleasures and the cares o’ riches, and could not run up the shinin’ road to God.



“Through a needle’s eye! Isn’t that much the same as enterin’ in at the strait gate? The gate’s just wide enough to let our souls in, but it can’t be stretched to let in one rag of our possessions. If we poor folk love our bits of cottages, or our gardens, or our boats, so as to make us forget God, why, we are trying to drive our camel through the needle’s eye; and it can’t be done. We’re what the world calls poor, almost all of us, but we can make Jesus very sorrowful. If we were out in a great storm, with darkness comin’ on, and rocks, strange rocks ahead, and us driftin’ on them, and we saw a quiet haven close by, only with a channel so narrow and so low an archway to go under that we must lower our masts and see that our tacklin’ was all taut and tight, would we go on to the rocks and be lost, rather than run into that safe harbour? Nay, wouldn’t we quit nets, and boats, and all, and escape with our bare lives? You would, you would. Well, then, for your soul’s sake, get rid of all that keeps you back from God; enter in at the strait gate; go through the needle’s eye. Peter said, ‘We have forsaken all, and followed thee; what shall we have, therefore?’ Ah! Peter, are you goin’ to make a bargain with the Lord?



But the Lord was not grieved with him. The disciples had done their part first ; they had done what the rich man could not do. They had forsaken all they had and followed Him. They had gone through the needle's eye. And what did Jesus promise them? Everlasting life! The only thing the poor rich young man lacked. Well done, disciples! Good and faithful servants! Ye shall lack nothin'; enter ye into the joy of our Lord.

“ The kingdom of God ! There are no rich folks or poor folks there ; no great men or small men. ‘ The rich and the poor meet together ; the Lord is the maker of them all.’ He makes men rich or poor as he sees fit, knowin’ what is best for every one of us. ‘ We brought nothin’ into this world,’ says Paul to Timothy, ‘ and it is certain we can carry nothin’ out.’ ‘ The love of money is the root of all evil,’ he says again, ‘ which while some have coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.’ Jesus might well be very sorrowful over the rich young man. He went away to pierce himself through with many sorrows. *Pierce himself through with many sorrows!*

“ But I was wishful to say a word or two about the

kingdom of God. Paul was caught up into the third heaven, and heard unspeakable things, which it is not lawful for man to utter. That is the grand palace and throne of the kingdom ; but the kingdom of God is here in this life. Paul says, and he knew better than most men, that it's righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. It's mostly an unspeakable thing, but I'll tell you all I can about it. There's righteousness. You and me, we can live in this world in a way to please the righteous God. I know I've my faults and failin's ; all of us have ; but there's many a thing I do that I can look up to God about, and know He is pleased with it. 'I do always those things that please Him,' says Jesus. Ah, Lord ! Thou wert His only begotten Son, in whom He is ever well pleased. But we do not always do things that please Him ; only sometimes ; when we are most like little children playin' at work, and thinkin' they are pushin' father's boat down into the sea with their little hands, whilst he's pullin' with might and main, and smiles at them for helpin' him. God smiles down upon us when we think we're helpin' Him.

“Then after righteousness comes peace ; the peace

that Jesus left to His disciples. He was goin' into glory; and He left His peace with us, a peace passin' all understanding. I'll try to tell you what it is like, though it is unspeakable. Sometimes I've been far away from land on the open sea, and there's been nought but blue sky above me, and the blue water all around me. The sky seemed like the sea, and the sea shone like the sky; all calm, quietness, peace. No land there with its work and worry. And I've let myself float on it, like a babe lyin' on its mother's lap looking up to the blue smilin' sky above me. That's how my soul is with God. I am restin' upon Him in a great calm and peace. There's nought but God above, and beneath, and all about my soul. When it lifts up its eyes and looks around there's nought but God to be seen; there's no fears, no cares, no steerin' or rowin' for itself. Above it there is only the smilin' face of God. This is peace; what joy unspeakable and full of glory is I don't know yet, but my joy shall be full, and no man shall take it away from me. This is the Kingdom of God.

“ Rich men that love their riches, and poor men that hate their poverty cannot enter in, except through the

needle's eye. Which of you will pass through the needle's eye?"

Old Fosse had been standing with his face turned towards the dusky group of listeners, sitting silently in the dimly-lighted interior, while Justin had remained in the corner of the porch, from which he could see the sunlit cliffs. As the old man's voice, growing tremulous as it came near the close, altogether ceased, he moved quietly away, and taking an unfrequented track, was soon beyond the sound of the singing, which rose and fell at measured intervals. It was a lovely summer evening, and Justin sought a quiet, solitary spot on the cliffs, where no eye could see him, and no foot pass by.

He wished to be alone. All day his soul had been dwelling in darkness; and a new light was dawning upon it, solemn and mysterious as the daybreak after a tempestuous night. In his dread of poverty, and his desire to be rich, he had fallen into temptation and the snare spread for him, and had erred from the faith. He had shut himself out of the kingdom of God.


Then there came to him one of those strange and mysterious crises in the history of the soul, which none

know save those who are called to pass through them. A deep awe overwhelmed him, and he hid his face even from the dying light of the day. The earthy husk of life was stripped off, and shrivelled up in the presence of the mighty influence that swept over him. His soul was wrestling for a greater blessing than he had ever dreamed of before. Not a word came to his lips, or was fashioned in his brain. He was not conscious of the flight of the solemn hours. The quiet sounds of night did not penetrate his ear, and the soft summer breeze touched his head without arousing him. So motionless was he, he might have been dead.

But when he raised his head and lifted up his pallid, awe-stricken face, there was no more irresolution in his heart. Herford lay below him in the dusk of the summer's night, with its sleeping cottages and strip of silver-sand, where the white-fringed waves were rippling quietly. Above it rose his home, with one light burning still in Pansy's window. The church stood out clearly on its little slope of rising ground. All this was his own no longer. He must go out into the world recognized no more as the prosperous landowner and popular magistrate. There would be conflicting and

false rumours about him, and for a few days he would be the wonder and talk of the county. Then he would be forgotten, and Richard would be Herford of Herford.

He had suffered the bitterest pang for his daughter's sake. As yet, indeed, he did not know what the conflict had cost him, but it was over. There was a great calm in his inmost soul, as of one whose feet feel the steadfast rock beneath them after long buffeting with the mighty waves of the sea. He knew that he had only one master, and that the yoke of all other servitudes was broken from off his neck. The love of the world had been cast into the consuming fire of the love of God, and had been destroyed for ever. He had entered into the kingdom of God.



CHAPTER III.


RESTITUTION.

IT was more than ten years since Justin had turned aside into that way which had seemed good in his eyes, but he had held the estates against the silent protest of his conscience no longer than eight days. He had been fully persuaded, possibly because he wished it, that his step-brother was dead, and that Herford was fairly and justly his own. Even during these eight days the conflict had been more on behalf of his daughter than for himself. But now he was resolved to face the reality, to be true. What he could do to shield Pansy from suffering he would do, for himself he was almost ready to welcome it.

But the path was no easy one to pursue, though the inward barriers were cast down. It was a solemn night for Justin, as he deliberated over his immediate action. Richard must be reinstated in the house of his

ancestors, whilst he must turn out into the world with a shadow attending him which would cling to his name, and dim the fair reputation he had won. He was utterly stripped of all, even of his name, for he would no longer be Herford of Herford. Now that the question was settled he could see his position with great clearness: he must become an almost penniless man with a suspicion dogging him like his shadow. For how would the world understand what he had done? What would those nearest to him think of it? How would Diana, how would Pansy bear it?

He came down late in the morning and inquired for Richard, who was gone into the village, the servant told him. Richard had not been present in the church the day before, in spite of Pansy's entreaties that he would go with her to hear her father preach. The irritation caused by the continual sight of his elder brother occupying the position that was his by birthright, was working within his shallow nature as much deep hatred as he was capable of feeling. He had met with Diana as she came out of church, and walked with her over the cliffs to Rillage Grange, where he stayed the rest of the day, and late on into the night. Leah Dart had found him



there on her return from her uncle Fosse's preaching, and as soon as Miss Di left her father and his guest, she relaxed her stringent rule, and indulged her patient, and Master Dick, with something very nearly approaching the carousals so strictly forbidden by Dr. Vye. She watched over Mr. Lynn's glass herself, but Richard was at liberty to drink as much as he pleased.

The consequence of this was that Richard was feeling dull and in low spirits this morning. Whenever his spirits sank, there was a lurking imp of self-reproach ready to lift up its head, and torment him with vexing thoughts of his old father dying, without recalling the curses he had invoked upon him. At these seasons Richard felt himself accursed. He was superstitious ; the old stories told him in his earliest years by the credulous and ignorant fisherman of a former generation had struck deep roots in his ill-informed and untrained mind. He had a fixed unshaken belief in the power of a curse, and of the sheer impossibility of escaping from its malign influence. His father's malediction hung over him like an eternal threat, never to be repealed. This morning he had awoke from a hateful dream, in

which he had seen vividly his father's withered face, and heard his broken voice muttering curses against him.

He was making up his mind that he must quit Herford, where every spot recalled his father, and seek some stirring scene where he might stifle such memories. He strayed absently through the churchyard, and into the church, the door of which was open. The walls of the old chancel were covered with marble tablets to the memory of past Herfords of Herford, and Lynns of Rillage. His father's monumental stone was there, containing simply his name, and the dates of his birth and death. There was no epitaph, no panegyric on his virtues—"Aged 83." These were the last characters. All the other Herfords had records of their having been good fathers, good husbands, and good friends. But no praise had been accorded to this last old man. He had lived and died, that was all. Richard stood gazing at it, with maudlin tears in his eyes.

"Father," he muttered, "if you'd forgiven me, I'd have given you a better stone than that."

He turned round hastily, hearing a footstep in the aisle. It was Justin coming up to him. There had

been no interview yet between the brothers without a feeling of chilly reserve, and almost a sense of animosity between them. But at this moment Richard was soft-hearted. His thoughts had been dwelling on the past, and he could remember how proud he used to be of his big brother, when he was yet a young boy not old enough to rush into sin. How good Justin had been to him when he came home for his holidays! He had indulged him with all the sympathetic kindness a big boy sometimes shows towards a little one.

Richard could recollect riding aloft on his shoulders over the fields, and swimming out with him towards the white-crested waves which tossed and played with him safely while his brother's arm was about him. He could not forget how earnestly Justin had striven to turn him aside from his mad career of folly and disobedience, nor how he had pleaded with him never to carry out his threat of running away from home. The hardship of seeing Justin made the head of the family consisted in the fact that he was not really his own elder brother and heir to the estate. It would have been no grievance if Justin had been born a Herford.

These thoughts hurried through Richard's mind as Justin came deliberately up the aisle, and he held out his hand in silence and grasped Justin's hand warmly. Justin was startled and touched to the quick. There had been no sign of sensibility or of penitence before in the returned prodigal, yet here he was standing before his father's monument with tears in his eyes. The old love for his younger brother, so soon smothered by the fatal indulgence that had ruined him, sprang afresh into Justin's heart. He clasped Dick's hand with a hearty pressure.

"Justin," he said, after a long pause, and speaking in broken accents, "it's an awful thing to have your own father's curse hanging over you! It can never be unsaid now, you know, and it's always working against me. How can a fellow repent, and grow better, when his father's curse is on him? I'm like Cain; I'm doomed to be a vagabond on the earth as long as I live."

Justin was grasping his hand still, and looking into his face with a grave and steady regard. He could love his prodigal brother now, and feel a keen and deep desire for his welfare. But Dick's words stung him.

Was it true that he had been binding his brother's soul to sin during all these years?

"Would you have repented if your father had forgiven you?" he asked.

"How can I tell?" replied Richard, almost petulantly. "He died cursing me; he cut me off, his only son."

"He forgave you before he died," answered Justin; "he forgave you fully, and he restored your birthright to you, as he thought. He gave our mother the will which disinherited you, as he believed, and bade her burn it."

"By George!" exclaimed Richard, turning very pale.

"It was almost the last thing he said in his life," continued Justin, "at the last hour. Till then he held fast by his resentment, and nobody knew he had forgiven you but me. But at the last he intended to make you amends. There is no curse upon you. Dick, my poor fellow, if that has kept you back from repentance and a better life, I shall rejoice for ever in what I am about to do this day."

"My old father forgave me!" he muttered.

“Fully,” answered Justin; “he intended to destroy his last will, which disinherited you. He always meant to destroy it the day you came home again, and he had it burned, as he thought, and as I thought too, on his death-bed. But he had made a mistake; he had put the wrong will into the wrong cover. He gave my mother the will he wished kept, and kept the one he wished destroyed—the one that made me his heir. It was a fatal mistake for me.”

“More fatal for me,” said Richard with a faint sneer. The suspicions that had been awakened by Leah Dart came back upon his mind with fresh force. A sudden low suspicion was manifest in his tone and manner which made Justin wince.

“It was a mistake full of harm for us both,” he said. “It would have been best for me to have made the truth known at once; but several considerations weighed strongly with me. I made every possible inquiry after you; I advertised in every colonial paper, and in the chief American papers, begging of you to return.”

“Ah! I saw some,” interrupted Richard; “but I’d heard the old man had cut me off with a shilling, and

I did not choose to come home to eat humble pie from a half-brother that had no right to the property or the name. By George! it's a queer story; it'll take a good deal of looking into, this will."


"If you had come home," said Justin quietly, "as soon as you saw my advertisement, I should have reinstated you. I took neither name nor property till I felt almost satisfied you were dead. You have been at home eight or nine days, and I am ready to relinquish all to you."

"Make me master of Herford!" exclaimed Richard, in intense surprise.

"I have already sent for Uncle Watson," he continued, "to advise us. He will satisfy you that I am acting in perfect fairness. There may be some little delay, but from this time you are the sole owner of the estates in my eyes. Richard, let this be the turning-point in your life. You are not a foolish headstrong lad now; listen to reason. You will step at once into a good position, with a fair income, larger than any of your forefathers had, and sufficient for the life of a country gentleman, who looks after his own lands and manages his own affairs. You will have considerable

power and influence, for which you must one day give account to God. If you have been troubled by the thought of your father's anger and curse, how much more you should be afraid of God's! I implore you, make this the point at which you will turn away from your follies and sins, and seek God's forgiveness. You would have sought your father's forgiveness if you had come home before he had died. Remember you have sinned against God, as well as against him."

"I have, Justin, I have!" sobbed Richard, overcome for the moment, but for the moment only, by conflicting feelings. It was characteristic of him that he gave no thought to Justin and the change in his circumstances. The old lurking terror of his father's curse was gone for ever. He had been forgiven and reinstated by the poor old man, whom he had deserted, and whom he could now afford to forget. He was no longer the penniless, dependent brother, liable to be cut adrift at any time, and sent back into the cold inhospitable world. He was the real master and owner of Herford, and Justin, the supplanter, was giving up the birthright to him. It was his own place; who else could have any claim to it? He must get to know all the ins




and outs of this extraordinary story. Why had he been left wandering about, in poverty and loneliness, while there was a good estate waiting for him? He should like to have a clear understanding about it.

"Not here," said Justin, when he gave utterance to this wish. "Your uncle Watson managed all your father's affairs, and as soon as he comes I will go through it all. I wish to hide nothing, nor to keep anything back. I will deliver my own soul, and I pray God yours may be delivered also."

"I wonder how long he will be?" rejoined Richard impatiently. "You're a parson, Justin, and bound to talk good, you know; but I can't think of anything else, till I know all. I'm glad enough to know the old man forgave me," he added in a lower voice.

"He forgave you fully," Justin reiterated with the greater emphasis, as he saw that his father's pardon had taken hold of his shallow nature.

"And I'll promise to forgive you fully," said Richard, once more holding out his hand to his brother; "yes, I'll forgive you beforehand, though I don't clearly understand it all. You need not be afraid of me, Justin."



He spoke in a tone of superiority, such as Justin had heard often in the later years of his brother's boyhood, when they had half angered and half amused him. He could not feel either anger or amusement at this moment. With a foreboding heart he looked earnestly into his handsome face, with its voluptuous, vacillating expression. Was he called upon to relinquish all the goodly work of his life into grasping, selfish hands like these, and trust all his generous schemes to a self-indulgent, worthless nature like this? But Justin could no longer do evil that good might come. He had entered into the kingdom of realities, where perfect integrity was essential, at whatever sacrifice. He must go straight onwards, and trust all the results to God.

"I'll go and meet Uncle Watson," said Richard.

For a short time Justin remained alone in the church, pacing up and down the sunlit aisle. He almost marvelled at himself that he could have run into such a snare, as to give up his lowly station for the possession of his step-father's lands. What would he not have given to be merely the vicar of Herford once again, with no aspirations after a wider sphere!

CHAPTER IV.

A FULL CONFESSION.

RICHARD HERFORD hurried away to the stables, his stables now, and ordered the groom to saddle Justin's horse for him. The lad demurred, and said his master might want to ride himself, whereupon Richard struck him sharply across the shoulders, quite after the manner of old times. He felt himself the master again.

He did not spare the horse as he galloped along the highway to Lowborough, for he was impatient to see his uncle, and pour out the whole story, so far as he knew it, to him. He overshot his mark in his eagerness, and missed his uncle, who had taken another road to Herford. By the time Richard had ridden to Lowborough and back, all thought of his father's curse, and his father's forgiveness, or of his own faint resolutions of reformation had faded from his mind.

He felt no anxiety except to enter speedily upon the inheritance so long withheld from him.

It was to a very unsympathetic, though not an unmoved, audience, that Justin made his full and candid narration of the circumstances attending his step-father's death. His mother and uncle set him down as a fool ; and his brother as a knave. They sat looking at one another in silence when the avowal was ended, which none of them seemed inclined to break.

"This is a pretty kettle of fish," thought Mr. Watson ; "why could he not come first to me, and let us talk it over quietly ? We might have taken proper measures, without letting Dick know all about it. Now he will never rest without every inch of land, and every penny of money passing into his hands. I'll be hanged if I know how the law stands !"


"Well, Justin !" exclaimed his mother, when the silence grew too much for her to bear, "I never heard such an extraordinary story in my life. I can take my oath I burned the will my poor husband gave me with his own hands. 'Take this packet,' he said, 'and let me see it burn away to a cinder,' and so he did. He gave the other packet to Justin, and said, 'That's my

last will; and you can testify I'm of sound mind.' If you believed it was the wrong one, why did you not speak up at once, before the other was destroyed?"

"Do not you all understand?" asked Justin. "I did not know of the fatal mistake till we opened the one that was kept, the day after my step-father's death."

"Well, well!" murmured Mr. Watson, who was overwhelmed by the intricacies and the importance of the case. He was growing a little puzzle-headed in his old age, and was in the habit of handing over all out-of-the-way matters to his younger and shrewder partner, Mr. Frost. He threw himself back in his chair, and pushed his spectacles high up on his bald forehead, staring at Justin with unassisted vision. Mrs. Herford tossed back her cap-strings, and smoothed her dress upon her lap, and gazed from one to the other of her sons.

"I always said right was right," she said, in her most oracular tone, "and I must say I always thought poor Dick was the rightful heir to his own father. It is a true saying, 'Murder will out.' Conscience is too much for us all, you see, Justin. I never suspected



you were carrying such a burden on your conscience ; and you a clergyman and a magistrate. I hope you won't be brought to a public trial ; for that would be a great trouble to me, as you are my own son. I wonder what your poor dear father Mr. Webb, would have felt, if he had lived till now ! But I'm sure my dear Dick will not prosecute, for my sake."

"Don't be silly, Susan," growled Mr. Watson angrily. "What is Justin to be prosecuted for ? It was the old man's own blunder, not Justin's ; and Dick never gave a sign of being alive till nine or ten days ago. I can testify how Justin did his utmost to find him. And now he gives it all up nobly. He is not standing out for any terms for himself, as he might have done, and as I should have advised him. I suppose the law would give the estate to Dick, for the disherison of an heir must be beyond question the intent of the parent ; and in this case the old man plainly intended Dick to inherit. But remember you have not a tittle of evidence but what Justin says."

"I am quite ready to say all I have now said in any court of law," remarked Justin.


"Oh ! go to law, go to law !" cried the old attorney,

“and beggar the estate to enrich the lawyers. What I advise is: let Dick have the inheritance of course, as his father meant him to have it, and let him allow you a younger brother's share; £300 a year or so out of it”——

“What?” exclaimed Richard, interrupting him.

“I say,” continued his uncle doggedly, “you ought to be so grateful to Justin for giving you an estate, that you should allow him a fair income out of it. Why, man alive! nothing on earth could have shaken him out of it! There was no flaw in the will; not a doubt about it. We drew it up, and have the instructions still in your father's own hand. Everybody said you richly deserved to be disinherited, and you would be a disgrace to the name of Herford; whilst he was worthy of taking the name and the lands. If you don't give him a share, you are a mean scoundrel.”


“Then I am a mean scoundrel,” replied Richard, with a sneer. “I should call it mean to keep a brother out of his own for ten years or more. He ought to be thankful if I do not sue him for the income he has spent, of my money. Could you reckon how much would be coming to me if he had put it into trust ten



years ago? By George, I've borne enough loss, without charging myself with any more."

"I wish for nothing from you," said Justin, "and I need hardly say it is out of my power to restore anything to you, of the spent income of the estate. If you had come back when you saw the advertisements begging of you to come, you would have entered into possession then, and I should have remained vicar of Herford."

"There should be a law that all wandering heirs put in an appearance once in seven years," said Mr. Watson, "or forfeit their claims and rights. Of course Dick must have the estates; but what is to become of you? You've almost fallen out of ~~the~~ ranks of the clergy, and there's ~~small~~ chance of preferment for ~~you~~. Besides, this strange story will run through the country like wildfire, and nobody will understand it rightly. I'll be whipped if I quite understand it myself. I think you might have kept quiet with a pretty clear conscience. If every man is to point out the flaw in his titles property would always be changing hands. I'll go home and consult Frost; he's as keen as a hawk. But we must make some terms, you




know. You cannot be turned out like a beggar on the world, at your age; and with our pretty little blossom into the bargain. What shall you do with Pansy?"

"Oh! Pansy need not turn out," said Richard, "let her stay with her grandmother. There's plenty of room in the old place, and I like to see pretty girls about it."

"Pansy can stay with me, of course," interposed Mrs. Herford. "though she has been a little too much petted to be of any real use. This will be a sad blow to her, but it will do her good, I hope; poor spoiled child! She won't be quite so flighty and high-spirited, not made so much of. If she were a little more humble, and kept herself more in the background, she would be really a nice girl, though I am her grandmamma, she looks much too big to be my grandchild," added the vain old woman, glancing at herself in the mirror, and lifting her shapely hands to the braids of hair upon her forehead.


"Pansy will go when I go," said Justin, shortly, "I can make a home for her. I am ready to transfer the estates to you as soon as the necessary documents are ready. Of course it will be burdened by a dower of



£500 a year to our mother, bequeathed to her in the later will ? ”

Mrs. Herford started from her chair in sudden alarm. Any insecurity as to her own income had not occurred to her. But now it struck her forcibly that the will which had been destroyed by mistake had left her absolutely dependent upon her younger son. Justin had paid her handsome allowance as regularly as Christmas and Midsummer came, and she had never offered to take the least share in the household expenditure. The tears stood in her eyes as she gazed imploringly at Richard whose face was impenetrable.


“ There must be no charge upon the estate,” he said. “ If my father left me everything, everything I will have. You can surely trust my mother to me ? This is a question to be settled between her and me, not between me and you. I’ve no intention of going to law in this affair. I said I’d forgive you, and I’ll stick to my word. If you like to leave Pansy here, I’ll be good to her, for she is an uncommonly nice young girl, and she’d help to keep the house alive. Not but what it will be alive when I’m master of it. We’ll soon put some life into the place, I promise you.”



"Dick, Dick, my dear dear boy," said his mother, pathetically, "I should like to have my money matters settled now, whilst we are all talking about it. Your father left me £500 a year, and it's no more than I ought to have. It must be made chargeable on the estate, as it is now. Thomas Watson, do open your lips and speak a word of common sense about it, if you can."


"I don't know what to say," he answered. "If the will that was destroyed is to stand, he left you nothing, and if the other will is to stand he left Dick nothing. It's a pretty kettle of fish. I think I'd better go home and talk it over with Frost."

"I say I'll take care of my mother," said Richard, in an irritated tone. "My father left me all or nothing, and all or nothing I'll have. Besides, she has been **saving money ever since my father died**. If any provision is to be made for Justin and Pansy it is her place to do it. She's their mother, and a sight closer relationship than I am to them. I've got to think it all over; and all I'll promise now is, that I won't go to law for Justin's sake—if he'll act fairly without it. I can't say anything fairer than that."



"I only wish to do what is right," answered Justin, as shortly as before. It was of no use to argue with natures as selfish and shallow as those of his mother and brother. They could not understand him, that was impossible. The elevated mood, which had been his since the evening before, was descending, step by step, into a more earthly one. Not that he repented of his decision, or wished to recall his confession ; but there was a blank disappointment hanging like a cloud over him. He scarcely knew what he had expected from his mother and Richard ; but his own emotion had been so deep and vivid, that he could hardly bear in patience the silly selfishness of the one, and the haughty superiority of the other.

He left his three kinsfolk still discussing his narrative ; for though Mr. Watson was puzzled and vexed, he could not bring himself to act on his conviction that it would be best to go home and talk it over with his partner. Justin had put the matter out of his own hands, and so far that was a satisfaction. But there was no satisfaction in thinking of his successor, and of the change that Herford must speedily undergo. He went away, heavy at heart, to seek his daughter.




CHAPTER V.

TELLING PANSY.


PANSY had been living in a blissful dream ever since she had received Robert Fortescue's letter. No doubt occurred to her that anything could cross or trouble their love for one another. Now that he had spoken, and spoken in words so thrilling and ardent, it seemed as if a fiat from heaven had gone forth, pronouncing that their union had been appointed there. She was little accustomed to think of money or position : but if these crossed her mind at all in connection with her love for young Fortescue, they met the all-sufficient response that her father was Herford of Herford, and Sir Robert Fortescue's friend. The only drawback to her perfect happiness was that she had not yet received her father's permission to answer his letter.

Justin's mind was equally free from doubt with that



of Pansy. He knew perfectly well that when he resigned his name and position in Richard's favour, Sir Robert Fortescue would peremptorily forbid all further intercourse between his son and Pansy. This had been the last consideration that had yielded to the stern cry of conscience. He would have given worlds to spare Pansy. His share in the sacrifice demanded of him was nothing compared with hers. The deep inward peace of having entered into the kingdom of God was troubled by the thought that she must suffer for his sin. How would the child bear it? For she was still a child to him, the little motherless girl who had never missed a mother's love through his exceeding tenderness. The little grain of wrong, like a grain of mustard-seed, had grown into a great tree, and the branches of it were spreading over the green pastures of the kingdom of heaven and casting dark shadows even across them.


Pansy was pale this morning and her eyes were somewhat dim. She had passed an almost sleepless night, for she could not go to bed quietly whilst her father was still absent from home, and it was past midnight when he came in. He had not seen her as



she peeped through the door when he stole softly past to his own room, but she had noticed how wan and worn he looked, and how strange a light shone in his eyes. For the first time she thought her father's conduct unaccountable.

Why should he not rejoice when his brother came home again?—a brother so many years younger than himself, towards whom he might act almost as a father. She wondered at it. Pansy had never supposed that the withered grumbling old man whom she dimly remembered was not her own grandfather, her father's father. Richard had very soon been forgotten in the village, as far as village gossip went, when Justin became master, and Pansy had never heard his name mentioned as the rightful heir. That her father possessed Herford Court in any other way than by inheritance as the eldest son was a fact of which she knew nothing.

She was musing on her father's unaccountable conduct when he entered her room. The change in his face since they left London struck her more forcibly than it had yet done. It looked older and greyer, and the air of genial self-content was gone. Pansy



had been very proud of her distinguished looking father, and had compared all the men she had met with him, much to their disadvantage, excepting Robert Fortescue. As he came towards her she rose to meet him, her face quivering with emotion, and her lips too tremulous for speech.

“Pansy!” he said, in an agitated broken voice.

“Father!” she cried, pressing close to him and looking with wistful eyes into his face.

“I have something to tell you, my darling,” he said.

“Is it anything about him?” she whispered, a faint colour rising to her pale cheeks; “have you any bad news about him?”

“No, no,” he answered, “but what I have to tell you concerns us all, you and young Fortescue and me. It is a long story I have to tell, Pansy,” he added sadly.

“And I love to hear long stories,” she said; “you shall sit down in your own chair, father, and I’ll sit on my footstool beside you, and you shall tell me your long story cosily.”

Justin had a chair of his own in Pansy’s attic, a

large old arm-chair, furnished with cushions worked in cross-stitch by Pansy's fingers when she was a child. She placed him in it, and drew her own low seat beside him, imprisoning his hand in hers, and rubbing her soft cheek against it caressingly. For a minute or two the extreme bitterness of the trial that lay before him made it impossible for him to speak, and she lifted up her pretty girlish face in surprise.

"Father!" she exclaimed, "is it something very bad?"

"Very bad!" he echoed, "it will change all our life, yours and mine, Pansy. If I could bear the penalty alone it would be nothing; but you will suffer for my fault."

"Tell me all about it," she answered, fastening her eyes upon his face. She did not turn them away for a moment while he was telling his story minutely. He earnestly desired to make himself understood by her, to show her the intricate inner workings of his reason and judgment, and especially of his conscience. If she misunderstood him how could he hope to make any human being judge him fairly? There was a pathetic patience and tenderness in his tone as little by little he

unfolded to her the story of the past, and the special crisis of the present. Pansy's blue eyes seemed to grow darker and deeper as she listened.

"Who are you then, father," she asked, "if you are not my grandfather's own son, not Herford of Herford?"

"I am nobody!" he answered.

"And I am nobody's daughter!" she exclaimed; "I am not even Pansy Herford."

She dropped his hand, and left her seat beside him, flitting away to the oriel window, where she stood looking out, with her back towards him. He could see only her slim erect figure, and her bright head bent down a little. Her brain seemed in a whirl. Had she really heard her father say that he had no right to this pleasant home of theirs? That he had already given it up to its legal owner? That he had not even a right to the very name they bore? If all this was to be swept away, her own identity must be swept away with it. She had never lived anywhere else but at Herford; she knew no other people. At this moment she forgot even her love for Robert Fortescue. If there was no Pansy Herford, what miserably deluded girl was she?

“It was cruel of him!” her heart cried in intense bitterness. Until this hour she had felt a passionate admiration of her father; a perfect, unquestioning faith in him. Pansy had never yet suffered from being tempted; and it is hard for a young innocent creature to make allowance for either folly or crime. That her father should have been guilty of anything approaching to a deviation from the strict path of rectitude, that there should be even the appearance of evil in his conduct, was unutterably intolerable to her. This was why he could not rejoice when his younger brother came home. Oh, if she could but reinstate her father in his grand pre-eminence over other men! But that could never be. He was not the heroic, princely, sublime personage her fancy had delighted to portray him. He had fallen; and the deadly wretchedness of disappointment was taking possession of her heart.

“Am I to lose you also, Pansy?” he asked, after a long silence.

The words, and still more the tone in which he spoke, touched her to the quick. She was all that was left to him, that was clear. Since the morning he

had given up lands, and friends, and fame, his name almost, in obedience to the demands of his conscience. He had nothing belonging to him but his little daughter. If she stood aloof from him he would be altogether forlorn and deserted. Pansy uttered a low cry, and clasped her hands together. She understood now why Diana Lynn still clung to her father. Nothing could set aside that relationship. Whatever he might become, or wherever he might go, he would be her father. With a second low cry, Pansy flew across the room and flung herself into his arms.

"Then I have my little girl still?" he said, in an agitated voice.

"Oh, yes! yes!" she cried, clinging to him with all her might; "but it will make all the difference in the world to us."

"It will," he answered sadly.

"We shall be quite poor, you and I?" she said.

"Quite poor!" he repeated. "We must leave Herford."

Leave Herford! She had not had time to think of that. Leave the place that belonged to all her past

life; the old familiar fields, the cliffs, the sea. Leave all the people whose faces she knew and loved, and who had cared for her longer than she could remember. She could quit the house, which was no longer her home, which had never rightly been her home; but how could she leave Herford? Yet the sudden recollection that for the last few days she had admitted to herself the possibility of living elsewhere flashed across her mind.

"Father," she said softly, "of course you will come and live with me when I am married? Richmond will wish it, I know. He thinks there is nobody in the world like you. Oh, father, may I not write and ask him to come over, and hear all these things from you? I could never make him understand all in a letter. I must tell him how poor we are now. But none of us will mind about being poor."

For a minute or two Justin did not answer, reluctant as he was to dissipate his daughter's unworldly ignorance. It was possible, certainly, that young Fortescue might remain true to Pansy. Justin's own disposition towards women was of a chivalrous and romantic turn. But he knew very well that Sir Robert

Fortescue would set his face as a flint against the marriage of his son with a penniless girl. It would be best to prepare Pansy for the trial lying before her, with regard to this young and innocent love of hers.

"My dear child," he said, after a pause that had seemed intolerably long to her, "do you imagine his father will consent to his son being poor? What do you think Sir Robert Fortescue will say of me? He will call me an impostor, and a knave, or a fool. He might have been my friend, possibly, if it had not been for this love between you and his son; but now he must blacken my character to save his own."

"Father!" ejaculated Pansy, looking at him in terror.

"My darling," he went on, "if Robert Fortescue is worthy of you he will be true to you; and, though you may have long and many troubles before you, you will be happy at last; all the happier for the trouble beforehand. You may write to him, Pansy, if you wish it. Only remember, love, remember, you have no mother to read your letter before it goes."

"I shall remember," replied Pansy.

Justin stooped his head to kiss her fair simple


young face. He would have purchased her happiness by a life of wretchedness for himself. But it was not possible to separate their lots. If any stigma rested upon him, it must rest also on her. His poverty was hers ; his exile from Herford swept her from this peaceful home into the wide world, where he must seek his fortune. "The sins of the fathers are visited upon the children." There was no evading that law.

CHAPTER VI.

MRS. CUNLIFFE'S TACTICS.

THERE was unbounded excitement in Herford and the neighbourhood when it was known that Justin was about to relinquish the estate to his younger brother, and the rightful heir. Leah Dart was satisfied that her discovery of the torn paper was at the bottom of it, and she told her story triumphantly about the village. His enemies, of whom he had a few, as every man has, asserted that he had forged old Herford's will, and that, though he was a clergyman and a magistrate, he had often passed sentence upon offenders against the law much less guilty than himself.

Richard Herford kept silent, and so did Mrs. Herford. Gradually it had dawned upon them that no power outside himself could have forced Justin into giving up the possessions he held. They saw that he had done a deed of which they felt themselves



incapable. Mr. Watson was continually either praising Justin's nobility, or blaming his want of common prudence in not securing terms for himself; and by degrees the idea took root in their minds that on the whole Justin had done a great deal more than could have been expected of him. So they held their tongues, and spoke neither good nor evil.

But there was one person in Herford whose inmost heart quailed when the news reached her. Mr. Cunliffe was not at home yet, but he was coming at the end of the week; and his wife knew his first impulse and his fixed determination would be to resign his living in Justin's favour. It would never do to lose Herford Vicarage. Suppose dear Jenny became mistress of Herford Court, how sweet it would be to live close beside her! Mrs. Cunliffe put on her bonnet and hurried away to see Justin, and make sure there was no feebleness in him which would accept her husband's sacrifice.

Justin was busy in the library surrounded by papers and letters, which had been the accumulation of years, but which must now necessarily be sorted out, and the greater part of them destroyed. "He looks fully his

age," thought Mrs. Cunliffe, with some satisfaction ; for though Justin was only four years younger than her husband he had always looked ten years younger, and she had grudged him this trivial advantage. He met her with a friendly smile as she entered the room with a timid aspect, and walked across the carpeted floor as if it had been paved with egg-shells. For Pansy's and Diana's sake, Justin was favourably inclined to all their sex, and Mrs. Cunliffe was the wife of his dearest friend, so he gave her a cordial reception.

"My dear Mr. Herford," she said in her humblest tone, "surely, surely this terrible news cannot, cannot be true! You are not going to give up Herford to your brother Richard, as people say?"

"I have given it up," he replied ; "the deed of gift is being prepared by our lawyer."

"Oh, dear! dear!" she cried, clasping her hands ; "what a terrible trial! What a trial to us all, to you, and our sweet Pansy, and my poor Philip! Philip is bound up in his charge ; his very heart and soul are in it. It would break his heart to leave his poor dear people, who are so attached to him. He thinks of his parish night and day—more than he does of me, his

own wife, and seven children. Seven children, Mr. Herford ! And there is no chance of the bishop doing anything for Philip. He has no influential friend in the world ; and he never seeks a favour from any one."

"I hardly understand you," said Justin.

"Why ! of course if you give up Herford Court, Philip will feel bound to give up his vicarage to you," she answered ; "it will be his first act ; I know it will. He never minds where he goes, or what he wears, or eats and drinks, so that he is at his work. He hardly thinks of the children, except their souls. Somebody must think of these things ; and, oh ! Mr. Herford, remember there are seven of them, and you have only Pansy. I ought to have sent Jenny away from home as a governess, but your dear kind mother is so fond of having her here, and she is hardly nineteen yet. I know we ought to give up our home, and all we have to you, but I can't see what will become of us all."

Her voice faltered, and she hid her face in her handkerchief. Unfortunately Mrs. Cunliffe was not able to weep easily ; and, though she was in real alarm and terror at this moment, not a tear-drop glistened in her

eyes. But hiding her face had quite the same effect upon Justin.

"My dear Mrs. Cunliffe," he said earnestly, "this is quite a mistake of yours. Such an idea as taking Philip's living from him never crossed my mind, or any one else's except yours, I'm quite sure. No, be comforted. I'd sooner beg my bread than take his post from him."


"But Philip will be all on fire to do it, I know he will," continued Mrs. Cunliffe; "I believe he'd like to live in a wilderness, and be fed with manna rained down from heaven on purpose for him. He was quite content with one hundred and twenty pounds a-year, and did not care how brown and frayed his clothes were, or whether he had meat for dinner or not. We've been so happy and comfortable here on three hundred pounds a year, and so many little helps from our good neighbours, it made me quite wretched to think of going away to only a curacy again. If you would only give me a solemn promise that you would not let Philip give up the living?"

"How solemn a promise do you want?" he asked with a half smile. "I assure you nothing on earth

would prevail on me to take Philip's living. Besides, neither my brother nor I would like it. Richard could not like to see me still in the place, and he would not give the living to me, you may depend upon it. Send Philip to me as soon as he reaches home, and I will make him hear reason."

Mrs. Cunliffe went away greatly comforted. She found special consolation in the idea that Richard would never appoint his brother vicar of the parish ; and if so her husband's living was safe, and she was secure in the comfortable home Justin had given to them. She encountered Richard, and congratulated him with effusion. It might have been the dearest wish of her heart to see him reinstated in his right.

"A mean little humbug!" said Richard to himself, for he had no high opinion of women, such as Justin had. He did not trouble himself to be very courteous to her ; but she did not resent his lack of courtesy. She was accustomed to think of herself as a poor vicar's wife, and it was perfectly easy to her to bow down to wealth and power, which at this moment were represented to her by Richard Herford, from whom she could quite humbly pocket any impertinence.




Philip Cunliffe reached home on Saturday evening, and as soon as he heard the startling news he rushed off to seek his friend. He was ready, he said, with an eager light shining in his eye, to strike his tent and go out again, whither he knew not, under the same guidance as that which had brought him to Herford. Justin reminded him of his wife and children. His wife, he declared, was of the same mind as himself, and his children were but children to whom every change was a pleasure, and who did not find decent poverty a hardship. "Why should any Christian deem poverty a hardship?" he asked, with a kindling face. Was not the Master poor?—a carpenter, working for his daily bread? And should the servant be above his master, the disciple above his Lord? It was only when Justin urged upon him that it was absolutely impossible for himself to remain in Herford after all that had taken place, and that some other vicar, more to Richard's mind, would be appointed in his place, that Philip Cunliffe consented, with tears, to retain the quiet and secure home his friend had given to him.

"We shall at least be a hundred a year poorer," he said, in a slight accent, as of triumph; "if your brother

continues to grant us that extra hundred, you will accept it from me, Justin? You will pledge yourself to that?"

"I think I may pledge myself to that," answered Justin, smiling at his friend's enthusiasm and ignorance of human nature, of Richard's nature in particular. But this was hardly fair to Philip Cunliffe, who had had very little opportunity of knowing Richard, and whose faith in his fellow-creatures was only a little less than his faith in God.

Nor was Justin quite fair to his younger brother. The two tall stalwart men were often seen at this time, passing from field to field together, apparently on good terms, while Justin explained to the new proprietor what he had done in the past, and what he had meant to do in the future. Richard was gloomy and sometimes surly, but he listened to Justin's plans with close attention, marvelling all the time that he should retain so much interest in them now they concerned him no longer. To him the fields were so many acres of meadow or arable land. To Justin they were, each of them, living and breathing portions of his life, dear to him as the Garden of Eden was dear to Adam. He could not endure to think of them neglected and over-



grown with thistles and weeds. The land had owned him rather than he had owned the land.

"How much do you reckon the estate is worth?" asked Richard, one morning, as they stood on a high point, and could see a goodly portion of it stretching round them.

"In hard cash it is worth £50,000," answered Justin; "to me it is worth more than any money you could name."

"By George!" exclaimed Richard, "I cannot make out why you gave it up; not out of love to me, I know. Look here, Justin, I can't bring myself to make any charge on the estate for you or my mother; I must be free to do what I like with my own. But I promise to take care of her, and if ever you are in want of ten or twenty pounds, I don't mean once or twice, but as often as you like, you just let me know, and you shall have it. I'll stand by that."


He grasped his brother's hand in a close grip, meant to speak more than his words, which had expressed his thoughts more awkwardly than he had intended. He was neither eloquent in speech nor refined in feeling; but Justin knew, from that moment, that he possessed a good deal of influence over his half-brother.

CHAPTER VII.

UPROOTED.

IT was not in Justin's nature to linger at Herford, after having installed Richard as its proprietor. It was better to bear the pang of leaving his old life than dally with it. He had no oppressive cares for the future—uncertain and untried as it was. He was still in the prime of life—only a year or two over forty—and from his active out-of-door mode of living, young for that age. He dwelt with some satisfaction on the creditable appearance he had made in London, at several of the spring meetings, and relied with some confidence on the favourable impression he had made. To London he resolved to go. Where else, indeed, could he seek his living.

He was obliged to leave Pansy behind him, and for the first time in her life the child felt herself alone. It was yet but a few weeks since he had received the letter




on which her hopes were still living, though they were growing fainter and fainter every day. She had written to Robert Fortescue a girlish letter, full of shy hopes and fears; but there had come no answer to it. Her father had been in communication with Sir Robert, but he had not shown her any of the correspondence. There was a blank void feeling of disappointment and inexperience in her heart. She did not know what to think, what to believe. One thing she could not believe, that he would desert her.

Poor little Pansy! Her father was not only gone away, but she had altogether lost the father she had blindly idolized and revered. He was more worthy of her love than before, but she felt he was not the pattern of mankind, without a flaw, that she had fondly thought him. Was she not even now suffering for his sin? Her home, too, was lost, had crumbled away under her feet, carrying into ruin her charmed childhood. Even herself had gone down in this earthquake, for instead of being the queen of the little fishing village, heiress to one of the loveliest spots of earth, and, as a result of this, worthy of being the chosen wife of the future Sir Robert Fortescue, what was she? The

daughter of a penniless man, whose fair fame was under a cloud, and who was held guilty by some of a crime approaching to dishonesty.

Here was ground for amazement and for deep anguish of spirit. Not one grief, but many griefs, had met Pansy's soul on its delicate and dainty paths, and turned it aside on to the dark mountains. As long as her father was with her, she had hidden her anguish under a placid smile that had almost deceived him, in spite of his tender and vigilant love for her. He knew she could not but suffer ; but he had no idea how deep and keen her suffering was. He dared not tell her there was no hope for her young love, trusting it would die away gently for lack of nourishment. As soon as he could make a home for her in London she was to go to him.

But as soon as Justin was gone, and his quiet vision could no longer detect any change in her aspect, Pansy began to droop. The frank blithe face, that had always been turned to him for sympathy grew worn and sad ; the springing step became slow and languid : and all the mournful amazement of this dire calamity spread itself around her. Jenny Cunliffe was too gay to have



much fellow-feeling for her, for her spirits were kept in a constant tumult of glad surprise at her mother's lavish liberality, and by the attentions of Richard, who expended a good deal of his idle time upon her. For Pansy held herself aloof from her uncle, whose return had worked all this wretchedness, and he felt somewhat sore at her avoidance of him. So she was bereft of Jenny's companionship.

Pansy shrank even from Diana Lynn. Her father had solemnly confided her to Diana, who had come over frequently to Herford Court, notwithstanding Mrs. Herford's coldness of demeanour, to see after her beloved charge. Next to Justin Diana loved Pansy more than any one else in the world; but the girl's sick heart turned away from her. In this hurricane all her trust had been destroyed, and her faith and love uprooted. Robert Fortescue had forsaken her, her father was not the demi-god she had fancied. All was lost. There was nothing before her to live for.


The old dames and the mothers in the village watched Miss Pansy with open-eyed anxiety. They made much of her, and bewailed in her ears the change that had rendered her no longer Pansy Herford of Herford. Old

Fosse and his wife spent many sleepless hours thinking of her, and devised little schemes for giving her pleasant surprises. But surprises had no longer their charm for Pansy. They summoned a sad faint smile to her pale face, which almost broke their hearts, and set them consulting with one another what they could do. It is not much that can be done for a bruised and wounded spirit.

“There’s only One can comfort her,” said old Fosse, mournfully, “Him as carried the lambs in His bosom. She’s like a poor lost lamb wanderin’ away from the fold, and I must seek her. I must comfort her some way, if the Lord ’ud only put it into my hands to do. For I reckon it’s Christian folks that must do the Lord’s work for him; the outside work, such as givin’ one another a kind word and a helpin’ hand. He’ll do all the deep work Himself.”

“She’s daunderin’ along this moment to the light-house,” said Mrs. Fosse, in a pitiful tone; “all alone, she is, poor blossom! It ’ud have been better for her if Master Justin had stuck to bein’ only parson!”

That was the thought that was dwelling in Pansy’s mind. To her utter amazement she found herself



envying Jenny Cunliffe's lot—that lot which had seemed so hard and poor to her only a few weeks ago. If only her father were the vicar of Herford! Justin's love for this quiet parish was deepened into a passion in Pansy's girlish heart. Everything about Herford was glorified in her imagination. There were no cliffs, no bay, no landscape, no skies, equal to those that had stretched around her and above her from her infancy. To-day she was sitting alone on the stone bench under the lighthouse. The tide was up to the rocks at her feet, and the gulls were rocking on the water, or sweeping to and fro in their flight upon its surface, so near that she could hear the fluttering of their wings. There was an intense mournfulness upon all around her. The sea wore an angry and sullen aspect, as though brooding over some fresh outbreak, and the sky overhead was heavy and leaden-coloured. The cliffs, without the sunshine, looked sombre and more precipitous. Pansy gazed across the gloomy sea with still more gloomy eyes. She was almost glad there was a storm gathering. Storms seemed more natural than sunshine and soft breezes. Why should nature be joyful, when she was in utter wretchedness?

"My dear!" said old Fosse's voice, close beside her, starting her out of her mood of solitary misery, "there's tempest in th' air. Come along, come along wi' me, down to your old mother Fosse as is looking out for you."

"Oh, Fosse!" she cried, "I'm going away to-morrow, and I shall never live here again. Never mind the storm. I want to stay here till it's quite, quite dark; till the tide has gone down, and the sun has set. It is the last time."

"You are going to your father, Miss Pansy?" he answered. The voice in which he spoke was questioning, but there was a tone of reproach in it. She was going to her father, yet she sat there in utter wretchedness.

"Yes," she said.

"Such a father as he is!" continued old Fosse tenderly. "When you were a little lass that couldn't speak a word plain, I've seen him carryin' you in his arms about wi' him wherever he went, like a mother. Many and many a time when I've met him hidin' you in his bosom against the cold wind or a sudden storm, I've said to myself, 'Ay! that's how my heavenly

Father's bearin' me and carryin' me, and hidin' me from the tempest, though I don't know Him any better than that little lamb knows her father.' He's taught me many a lesson out of his love for you."

"Oh, Fosse!" exclaimed Pansy, with a deep sob of reviving tenderness towards her absent father.

"He's taught me many a precious lesson," repeated Fosse, "out o' church; out o' church I say, for he wasn't altogether to my mind in th' pulpit. But out o' th' pulpit there never was such a man, never! His life's been a grand one, always stirrin', and encouragin', and betterin' everybody about him. It's been a rare grand life so far, and it will be grander now he's got into the kingdom o' heaven. He was never very far from it, but now he's gone through the needle's eye, my dear. Maybe he seems stripped of everything he had before, except you, Miss Pansy, and you're the most precious thing he has, but he's followin' Christ and he's findin' the true riches."

"What do you know about my father?" asked Pansy timidly.

"I know everythin', my dear lamb!" he said, touching his hat in token of respect for Justin. "He

came and told me all. It was a sore temptation, my dear, and he's broken through the snare. He's a grander man to me, Master Justin is, than if he'd kep' on bein' parson. He wasn't cut out for a parson, and he was cut out for a squire. I can barely see the mote in my brother's eye, though it's been big enough to keep him in darkness. But he's in the light at last, the clear light. 'He that loveth his brother abideth in the light, and there is none occasion of stumbling in him.' Master Justin stumbled, but he is on his feet again, and runnin' on his race now."

"The world won't think so," moaned Pansy half to herself. She was stung by the thought of her father being blamed; but if she could only regain her old confidence in his goodness and wisdom she would not feel so very desolate.

"We've nothin' to say to the world!" answered Fosse cheerily, "the world is under our feet. It 'ud be a strange thing for the eagle to stoop to listen to a crowd of chatterin' sparrows findin' fault wi' his flight up to the sun. Never mind the world, Miss Pansy. Shut your eyes to the world and keep 'em open to your father. There's only two loves, and they are set one

over against the other, as far as the east is from the west. There's the love of the world and the love of the Father! 'If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him,' says John. There's no findin' a loop-hole through that. And Master Justin has passed from the one to the other, bless the Lord!"

Pansy felt greatly comforted. Old Fosse was looked upon as the oracle of the village—even Mr. Cunliffe spoke of him as an authority on religious matters—if he praised her father rather than blamed him, there could be no reason why she should refuse to restore him to his old place in her love. There was another sorrow in her heart of which old Fosse knew nothing and guessed nothing. No one in Herford suspected that brief blissful dream of hers from which she was slowly and reluctantly awaking. She hoped they would never know it. She looked up to old Fosse after a long pause with a wan smile on her face.

"I am not so sorry to go away now," she said simply. "I am going to my father, and I do not expect ever to know any one better than he is."

"There you spoke a true word, Miss Pansy," replied old Fosse, "get a good grip o' that. Master Justin's

a good man and a grand man. Don't you hearken to the world, my dear; the world's always makin' mistakes. It crucified the Lord of glory. There's many more folks besides me as thinks Master Justin one o' the best o' men. Not without his faults and flaws, my blossom! There never was but one man on earth that had no fault in him. But you be sure, whether your father's master of Herford or earns his daily bread like one of us, he's a good grand man. You hold fast by that, Miss Pansy. You're like the apple of his eye to him, and if there's the smallest change in you he'll feel it. Whatever comes, you keep faithful to your father."

But when old Fosse was smoking his last pipe by his cottage fire before going off to his duty at the light-house, he shook his head sorrowfully as he recalled Pansy's sad face and the dimness of her bright eyes.

"Our Miss Pansy's got a blow," he said to his wife; "she's like a wounded bird that can fly no more in the sunshine. Master Justin built his tower but he had not counted the cost of it. What's done can't be undone, though it may be forgiven. Leaven cannot be

taken out o' the bread, and evil cannot be taken out o' the life. We're pardoned but we can't be let off. Miss Pansy must eat the bread her father leavened many a long year ago. Master Justin has eaten sour grapes, and her teeth are set on edge."

CHAPTER VIII.

WORK IN LONDON.

WHEN Justin met Pansy at the London terminus he was startled with a sudden and quite natural surprise at the loveliness of his little daughter. They had never been separated for a fortnight before, as they had been now; and memory is but a poor substitute for sight. Her face had lost its girlish quiet, but it had gained a higher beauty by the half-unconscious mournfulness which looked out through her blue eyes. Her smile was no longer bright and ready, but it had a world more tenderness in it; and though her voice was less ringing, it was softer and lower. She was no longer a child with no shadow of a care upon her; and it brought a sharp pain to his heart to perceive the change.


The lodgings he had taken seemed intolerably dingy and miserable for Pansy, when he came to look at them through her eyes. He had surrounded her hitherto

with everything that was pretty and elegant—little dainties lying altogether outside his own life, but forming an important portion of hers ; and it struck him keenly how comfortless and mean this new dwelling-place would appear to her. But how could he alter it ? He was a poor man in quest of work ; no holiday task in these times.

“ I hope it will be only for a little while, my darling,” he said, as Pansy’s eyes wandered from one shabby object to another ; “ very soon, as soon as possible, we will have a little home of our own, and you shall be the mistress of it.”

“ Father,” murmured Pansy, hiding her head on his breast, and lifting her hand caressingly to his anxious face, “ father, I do not mind where—with you.”

She fully believed it, and meant it as she spoke. Anywhere with her father. She roused herself, and tried to chatter and laugh like the Pansy of old ; stealing furtive glances at his altered face. For he too was changed. He looked old and grave compared with the rich and prosperous man who had found a welcome entrance wherever he would. It was the close of the season, and the special meetings had long been




over, and the speeches made at them forgotten, except by the orators themselves. The county families, and the bishop with his wife and daughters, who had taken so much notice of Pansy, had all gone out of town, and were scattered abroad. Sir John Fortescue only was in London, being kept there by the late parliamentary proceedings; but Justin fortunately had not come across him. The correspondence that had passed between them made each of them equally desirous to drop all acquaintance.

London, therefore, was changed. To Pansy it was a mere labyrinth of hot and dusty streets broiling under the August sunshine, with not a breath of fresh air to cool her fevered lips. Presently she found her way to Kensington Gardens, where there were many green and leafy avenues and corners less frequented than others, and where she could sit for hours undisturbed, panting for the breezy cliffs of Herford, and pondering over the lost days of the spring-time, when life had stretched before her as one long holiday of unbroken joy and gladness. Was it possible that only three months parted her from that blissful time?

But for Justin London was the hunting-ground for a

livelihood for Pansy and himself. He had seen his bishop, and given him a plain unvarnished account of his first fault, and of the restitution he had made; and the bishop had offered him the first living that should fall into his gift. But he could not resolve to enter the Church again for a living. He had felt no real call. During the seven years in which he had been vicar of Herford, he knew he had not kept the solemn injunction, "See that you never cease your labour, your care and diligence, until you have done all that lieth in you, according to your bounden duty, to bring all such as are or shall be committed to your care, unto that agreement in the faith and knowledge of God, and to that ripeness and perfectness of age in Christ, that there be no place left among you either for error in religion or for viciousness in life." He had not done that at Herford. It was clear in his memory how irksome the duties of his pastoral office had been. Now that he knew more of the kingdom of God, and of eternal life, he marvelled at his own temerity in rushing into so sacred a post as the ministry. It would be impossible to him henceforth to take the charge of souls as a means of gaining a livelihood for himself.



If it had not been for Pansy, he felt that he could have gone out as a missionary into some half-civilized communities, or some savage land, where his power of management and direction and his physical strength could have been turned to use. He would have gladly joined some mission enterprise that was full of difficulty and danger, and flung all his energy into it. He made one or two inquiries in this direction, but he did not push them, for there was Pansy to be considered, and Diana. What could these two do without him? He must have a very distinct emphatic call, an unmistakable assurance that it was the will of God, before he could forsake these two, as the disciples had forsaken all to follow Christ.

Somewhat heavy-hearted, he bethought himself, at last, of the editor of a religious newspaper, whose acquaintance he had made during the spring, when he had been the welcome speaker on several platforms. They had held some friendly converse together whenever they had chanced to meet; and he had struck Justin as being a shrewd, sensible, keen-witted man. Such a man, if he were in truth a Christian, could be of service to him in his present straits. For Justin's

funds were ebbing fast ; though he had as yet no distinct dread of actual poverty. It was with some difficulty that he penetrated to the editor's office, and when he reached it he was received with stiffness and coldness by his former acquaintance. The editor rose from his chair when he was announced, and did not sit down again, though he motioned him to a seat.

" You do not remember me ? " asked Justin, also standing.

" Quite well," he answered.

" You are, perhaps, aware of the change in my circumstances since I saw you last ? " he resumed.

" Perfectly," was the reply.

" I have to begin life anew," continued Justin.

" You are in orders," interrupted the editor, " your bishop was speaking kindly of you, the last time I saw him, at Sir Robert Fortescue's. There would be no difficulty in getting a curacy, or a small living."

" I cannot take a charge again," he said, " unless as a missionary, where I should have something more than the routine work of an English parish. I had no right to be in the Church when I was there. I cannot, however, offer myself as a missionary at present,

till I see whether my daughter could rough it with me. I want something to do for a while that I can do here, till she grows accustomed to this great change."

"Sit down, Mr. Herford," said the editor, resuming his chair, "and let us have a friendly chat together."

In another minute Justin had entered once again upon a full narration of his story to this casual friend, whose face was half-hidden from him by the hand that covered his eyes. When it was ended, he stretched out his hand to Justin, and grasped his heartily.

"There's one post I know of you could enter into at once," he said, "but the salary is small—not more than three hundred a year. We are looking out for a secretary for our mission to seamen. The duties are stiff. There are all the important sea-ports to visit, and to hold meetings at, where you would have to be chief speaker; and now and then a sermon to preach on behalf of the mission. All the correspondence would fall to you and the one clerk who is always at the office. There would be reports to write, and notices &c., to newspapers, attractively put, you know. Of course we desire a man thoroughly in earnest."

“I would take it gladly, if you think me suitable,” said Justin.

“You’re the very man,” replied the editor, heartily, “almost a seamen yourself. I shall see the committee this very night, and they will jump at you. We could never have hoped to get a man like you.”

“Thank God !” exclaimed Justin.

“What! for such a fall in the world?” said the editor. “You were introduced to me a few weeks ago as one of the leading men in your county ; and now you are going to be the travelling secretary of a poor mission, yet in its infancy.”

Their eyes met with a frank comprehensive gaze, and both smiled as they shook hands again with a friendly clasp.

“Thank God !” they ejaculated at the same instant.


CHAPTER IX.

HOME SICKNESS.

IT was still the early autumn, but though the sultry heat of the summer was gone, the streets of London, with their ceaseless stir and clamour of many sounds, were oppressive to the sick heart of Pansy, pining for her native place, with its fresh sea breezes and tranquil silence. Solitude in the midst of a throng of fellow-creatures was a new thing to her, for in Herford every face was familiar, and every tongue had some news to tell to her. There was something inexpressibly painful to Pansy's warm and girlish heart in passing a continuous stream of people who might be so many phantoms hurrying away into some ghostly world of which she knew nothing, and whither she could not follow them. It was a relief to her when her father found a settled employment. He set

about seeking a house for Pansy at once, in the suburbs, for he could not think of planting his little country-bred daughter in the midst of streets, where neither fresh air nor sunshine could come to her readily. Fortunately they fell in with a little old-fashioned furnished cottage on Epping Forest, before the beauty of the autumn was over ; and Justin, seeing that it struck Pansy's fancy, immediately offered himself as tenant for it.

It stood at a short distance from one of the main roads intersecting the Forest, upon an open space resembling a village green, about which were built a few scattered dwellings, most of them larger than the cottage, and one or two of them the mansions of wealthy people. Past the little garden in front of their new home swept an avenue of chestnut-trees, on which the polished brown nuts were just bursting through their prickly husks. It was this avenue that had caught Pansy's eye at first. Behind the house stretched the long low glades of pollard-trees and tangle of brushwood and bracken, and wild uncultivated land, with shallow pools lying in the hollows, and here and there clumps of old oak-trees and magnificent beeches which form the forest. This secluded spot, within six miles



of London, seemed almost as free from the din of traffic as Herford itself. The wind blowing softly through the trees, and over the fields of fern and brambles, was cool and fresh. The sky was still as blue as in summer, and the leaves were only beginning to change their dark green for brilliant hues of yellow or crimson. Hollyhocks and sunflowers and some late roses were blooming in the cottage garden. It seemed a paradise to Pansy after two months of dreary solitude in the stifling streets of London.


Pansy fought bravely against the heart-sickness and home-sickness that were pressing her hard, and undermining her strength. She laughed as often as she had done in her old home, but it was no longer the merry impulsive laughter, which could be traced to no cause except that of girlish mirthfulness. The servant, who had been recommended to them by the wife of the friendly editor, never saw her smile when her father was away. The absence of all familiar objects wounded Pansy's eye. The oddness of the furniture, which had all the dinginess and the gaudiness of a house to be let for short terms, contrasted painfully with the dear old household chattels at home, as she

still called Herford. All was strange, and to Pansy strangeness was terrible. Very soon her father was necessarily occupied with his new engagements, which were many and various. He could bring home some of his work, and Pansy was never so happy as when he was busy among his papers, in the little room which was called his study. She could give him no help, but she could look in from time to time, or bring her sewing and sit opposite to him, watching him with wistful eyes, and ready to smile if he glanced up at her. What would become of him if anything happened to her? she sometimes thought. She was all that was left to him, as he was all that was left to her, by this wild storm that had wrecked their former life.

But very little of Justin's work could be done at home. Usually he kissed her and bade her good-bye soon after eight o'clock in the morning, and she saw him no more till after sunset, often not till late at night, when he had any meeting to attend in the city. Oh! the long silent creeping hours! They were horrible to Pansy. She had never been accustomed to the indoor pursuits of girls of her age and station.

She could drive, and row, and fish, and ride over the farm ; she could spend hours in gossiping kindly with the villagers over their affairs, or she could teach classes of red-faced children in Mr. Cunliffe's school ; but she could take no interest in solitary needlework, or painting, or music, when there was no one near to listen, or to look at what she was doing. She had been suddenly uprooted, and she could not take root again in this strange spot, and amid the chill and gloom of these strange circumstances.

But when her father was compelled to quit her for a whole fortnight's journey, on a deputation from his missionary society, the solitude and gloom grew insufferable. It was November, and rain and fogs had set in. The forest glades were a swamp, and the bare branches of the trees were dripping with heavy rain-drops. The little green before the windows held pools of shallow water, and the stillness surrounding the place was profound. It was utterly unlike any experience Pansy had ever had. There was nothing she could do, but lounge in the easy-chair before the fire in their little drawing-room, amid the odd surroundings of her new dwelling-place, with a piece of



needle-work in her fingers. The London servant resented all interference from her uninformed young mistress, and hardly made a pretence of consulting her. It was scarcely daylight in the middle of the day, yet the long nights seemed worse than the dull days to Pansy, when the lamp was lighted, but shone upon no happy faces, as it had always done at Herford Court. Everything had faded out of her life; joy, and sunshine, and companionship. Love was almost gone too, thought Pansy, for there was no one to love her now, except her father. Her heart cried out bitterly yet tenderly for Robert Fortescue. How could he, could he, be so false to her.

These lonely, laggard, brooding hours were the worst mischance that could have befallen Pansy. Justin, when he opened his little daughter's letters, did not suspect how hardly his absence was telling upon her. She kept out of them the dejection she was suffering, and made the most of what she had to tell. It seemed not unlikely to him that her attachment to young Fortescue was but a passing fancy, which was dying out naturally and easily now she had proved him so unworthy of it. How gaily the child wrote of her new

home, and even the gloomy weather! He might throw himself into his work with an unburdened spirit, and go home when it was finished with no anxiety to mar his pleasure.


Yet all the while Pansy could hardly endure her life. The courage and cheerfulness she assumed, when she was writing to her father, forsook her the instant the letter was ended. She knew well where her father would tell her to seek for comfort; and she sought it in long hours of voiceless prayer, kneeling until her limbs were cramped, but her heart no lighter. The poor child wanted her days of careless happiness back again; and these could never return. That which is crooked cannot be made straight. It could never be that Justin had not yielded to temptation; that Robert Fortescue had not been unfaithful. These were no sins of Pansy's; but at present she was bearing the heaviest penalty for them. Every hour of her sadness cried to God, though there was no desire for vengeance in her heart. Rather, if she had thought her sadness made God angry with them, she would have striven hard to conquer it, as she strove hard to conceal it from her father.

CHAPTER X.

MRS. CUNLIFFE DEFEATED.

THERE were very gay doings at Herford, as Richard had promised. Where his new friends came from nobody knew; but they flowed from every part of the country, as though there had been a universal longing for Richard's reappearance. But they were all men of the same stamp; and the life they brought to the little fishing-village was turbulent and boisterous. There was a constant coming and going of scampish-looking horse dealers, or rollicking seamen, and dissipated townsfolk, who lounged about the village street and the beach, and were a grief of mind to all the sober-minded people of the place; and especially to old Fosse and Mr. Cunliffe.

Mrs. Herford, though fond of stir and change, did not quite approve of her younger son's choice of friends, who were in the habit of treating her with a rough



familiarity very offensive to her. She was an old woman, very often in the way; and they were not over-careful to conceal that this was their opinion. Richard himself was apt to regard her from the same point of view, when she insisted upon taking the head of his hospitable but noisy table. He hinted to her that she would be better in her own room; but she could not brook the idea of superannuating herself at the age of sixty before her hair was grey. Keep to her own room! Not as long as she could drag herself down to the rooms where she had been so long mistress; though she did not feel that she was mistress now, as she had been in Justin's time, when every one treated her with perfect courtesy.

Until this boisterous stream of life had fairly set in, Jenny Cunliffe had remained with Mrs. Herford; whilst her mother awaited with fear and trembling the moment when Mr. Cunliffe should wake up to the consciousness that his daughter was dwelling under the roof of the alien. Mrs. Cunliffe was building a splendid castle in the air. If only the master of Herford would propose to Jenny before her father interfered! She could make Jenny accept him; and in that case she felt that she

could stand as firm as a rock against her husband, and insist upon Jenny becoming the mistress of Herford. She watched nervously, and angled as skilfully for Richard as any fashionable mother could have done. But on the other hand Mrs. Herford was quite alive to the snares that were laid for her son. She did not care to lose Jenny, especially now Pansy was gone; for, like Richard, she was pleased to see pretty light-hearted girls about the house. So she kept Jenny with her; but she was careful to thwart all the mother's deep-laid schemes.

Possibly Mrs. Cunliffe might have won the field if it had not been for her husband. She heard his solemn voice ringing through the house late one evening, after all the children were in bed, calling her into his study; and she obeyed it with a quailing heart, and a sense of an impending crisis. He was standing at his open window, and across the narrow valley came the sound of very noisy music, and of a boisterous chorus, from the terrace under the windows of Herford Court. Mrs. Cunliffe took her place quietly at his side, and listened with him, as she braced herself up for a stern conflict.

"How soon is Jenny coming home?" he asked in a tone that thrilled through her.

"I can hardly say, my love," she answered meekly. "Poor Mrs. Herford misses Pansy so much, it would be cruel to take her away too soon."

"She must come home to-morrow," he said.

"To-morrow!" she rejoined; "why to-morrow, my dear? It would be impossible to take her away so abruptly; and I know Mrs. Herford cannot part with her at present. No, no, my love; we cannot have her at home again just now."

"Louisa," he replied, "it seemed to me but now that I heard a voice asking me how I was sanctifying the lives of those pertaining to me, so as to make them godly examples and patterns for my people to follow; and behold! I looked up, and saw the glitter of many lights, and I heard the sound of wild and godless mirth, in the house where my child is dwelling. It may well be my bounden duty to snatch her away from it this very night; but if not so, she must come home to-morrow."

"You would make Richard Herford your deadly enemy," she suggested.

"I cannot put his enmity in the balance with my daughter's eternal welfare," he replied.

"But, my love," she replied, almost weeping, "there is his eternal welfare to be considered. We are the only people who have any good influence over him; you must consider that. I have every hope of Richard becoming a truly good man; and he thinks so much of you! He is a little gay at present, with all these old friends crowding about him, to welcome him into his property; but his heart is not with them. He wishes to settle and marry; and a good wife will save him from all these bad habits. You would be glad to see him with a good wife?"

"To be sure, if he will be a good husband," answered Mr. Cunliffe.

"He will be a devoted husband," she resumed, growing bolder, "if he can marry the girl he loves. Is it not written, 'the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife?' St. Paul had seen many a gay young man converted by a happy marriage, I'm sure. I have great hopes of poor Richard Herford, if he can only marry the girl he loves."

"Do you know if he loves any one?" asked her

husband, whose eyes were still fastened on the house across the valley.

“Suppose—I am only supposing—it should be our Jenny!” breathed Mrs. Cunliffe tremulously.

“Woman! Louisa!” he ejaculated. “I would far sooner follow Jenny to the grave. A young reprobate like Richard Herford! Give me my hat! and make ready a bed for the child, for she shall sleep at home to-night. The thought of it never crossed my mind, careless father that I am! How could you think of such a calamity and not mention it to me?”

“I was only supposing,” sobbed Mrs. Cunliffe; “and oh! Philip, if he were only a good man, it would be so nice for Jenny! She would always be close to us, and you could take care of her eternal welfare. I shrink from sending her out as a governess, where nobody would care for her soul. If Richard were only converted! and I had such hopes he might be! Don’t go to-night, Philip; it would wound them all so. And how could you manage your parish if you make him your enemy? Think a little of your parish, and the immortal souls in it. Richard could hinder you on

every hand. It would do Jenny no harm to stay one night more."

"I will fetch her first thing to-morrow morning," he said resolutely.

Early the next morning, therefore, before Richard had slept off the effects of the last night's revelry, Mr. Cunliffe was at the Court, insisting upon his daughter's immediate return home. In vain Mrs. Herford remonstrated, and represented her own solitary position, bereft at once of both Pansy and Jenny. He told her plainly, though sadly, that Herford Court was no longer a fit home for the young girl, and he marched away with Jenny, who was frightened into silence by his unusual sternness.

"Jenny, my child," he said, as they walked through the little coppice which sheltered the drive to the Court, "Jenny, tell me frankly if you love this Richard Herford."

"Oh, no, father," she answered, her face growing crimson, under his searching gaze; "what made you think of such a thing? I like to be at the Court, everything is so easy and comfortable; and when Mrs. Herford is in a good temper it is all so pleasant; but it

has not been nice at all since Pansy and her father went away."

"Easy and comfortable! Pleasant and nice!" groaned Mr. Cunliffe. "Is that what you are living for, my child? Oh! I have been very much to blame; I have been a careless father. God help me to look more closely after my duties!"

No angry fault-finding could have touched Jenny's heart so keenly as these words of self-reproach. The tears sprang to her eyes. To hear her father accuse himself for her shortcomings was a hundredfold worse than having rebukes heaped upon her head. She stepped closer to him, and put her hand within his arm.

"Father," she said, with a little sob, "I'll try to choose hard things, as you do. I'll do any disagreeable thing you like. I'll go out as a governess, and get my own living at once. My mother says you'll be poorer now, because you'll only have the bare living. I was talking about it to her; only she said I must not be so ungrateful to Mrs. Herford, as to leave her now Pansy is gone. I don't care one pin for Richard Herford," she added, with strong emphasis, to assure her father,

and restore the usual placidity to his troubled face.

“God bless you, my daughter!” he said, with something of priestly dignity, “and may God keep you from every snare, whereby your young feet may be caught, and hindered from running in the way of His commandments. I shall have to part with you; but my punishment is far less than my sin. I shall not have to mourn over your unhappiness. I must seek a distant home for you.”

Richard Herford muttered an oath or two when he found, on coming down to a late breakfast, that Jenny’s pretty face was gone, and none but his mother’s was left to meet him at his table. He made a call at the Vicarage during the day, but saw only Mrs. Cunliffe, who told him, with a beating heart and in her meekest voice, that Jenny was going away from home, as a governess. “She’ll be a confoundedly nice governess,” said Richard; but that was all.

CHAPTER XI.

LEAH DART'S AMBITION.

THERE was a vague plan, half formed in Richard Herford's mind, that he would never marry, and that upon his death the estate should revert to Justin, or Justin's heirs. He knew perfectly well that his step-brother had yielded obedience to a higher rule of right than any he himself felt. An uneasy love and respect for Justin was born of this conviction ; and though he could not bring himself to make any compensation to him by giving up even a small portion of his hereditary possessions, he took pleasure in the idea of enjoying his life to the utmost, and of bequeathing anything that might be left at his death to his half-brother's family.

Richard also felt a very distinct dislike to the responsibilities and restraints of marriage. He had led a free and wandering life, and was already older in

many ways than Justin. It had never been his lot to come across any marriage that had worn a smiling aspect in his eyes ; and he had an unconquerable dread of linking his fate either with a vixen or a simpleton, whose claims would very much interfere with his own liberty and gaiety. "A short life and a merry one," was his motto, delivered boastfully at the dinner-table to his comrades. "He had no wish," he said, "to live to a decrepit spent old age like his father." Old Richard Herford had taken pleasure in talking to his boy of the free and happy life his had been before his marriage ; and these earliest maxims had taken deep root in his mind. He secretly believed that every girl aged into a silly or discontented old woman. Very different charms than those of poor Jenny Cunliffe were needed to break down these opposing opinions.

But of all this Mrs. Cunliffe was necessarily ignorant ; and she could not quite forego her hope of seeing Jenny the mistress of Herford. Never was fond mother more difficult about a situation for a daughter. Nothing pleased her. Even the wife of the rural dean was baffled, and almost offended ; as much offended, indeed, as one clergyman's wife could

be with the wife of the vicar of the next parish. Mr. Cunliffe could not understand how his efforts to remove Jenny to a distant home were frustrated. Mrs. Cunliffe remained the meekest and humblest of women ; and the objections she raised to every place that was open to Jenny were so plausible he could not gainsay them. He did not like Jenny staying in Herford, but he could not get her out of it. Even when Justin urged that she would come and spend the winter with Pansy, who sadly needed a companion, the welcome door was closed in Mr. Cunliffe's face.

"You should recollect, my dear," said Mrs. Cunliffe, in the severest tone she had ever used to him, "that there is no elderly lady like Mrs. Herford living in the house ; and your friend Justin Herford is quite as likely to marry as Richard. He is little over forty, and a most attractive man. I really cannot consent to send Jenny there for several months."

"Louisa," he said reproachfully, "Jenny is quite a child—not two years older than Pansy."

"She does not think of him as an old man, I can tell you," she replied. "I ought to have kept her more at home than I did, but she was under my own

eye, besides Mrs. Herford being at the Court. No, my dear ; if you would like Justin Herford for a son-in-law, send her there ; I have no power to prevent it, but she shall never go with my sanction. You may talk to her yourself, if you please."

Mr. Cunliffe felt quite miserable, and exceedingly perplexed. He could not fix the idea in his mind of his old friend becoming his son-in-law. Speaking to Jenny only made the matter worse, for she blushed and stammered, and said she would do what he chose ; the poor girl having been made uncomfortable about Pansy's father. He was forced into declining the invitation ; and Pansy was doomed to solitude for the winter.

But Mrs. Cunliffe was not the only person whose eye was upon the coveted position of mistress of Herford Court. Leah Dart, who saw him frequently at Rillage Grange, found food for her secret hopes in Richard's gay carelessness and familiarity. There had been a close intimacy between him as a boy and Mr. Lynn, in spite of the difference in their age ; and this intimacy was renewed on a more equal footing. Thanks to Leah Dart, and her supremacy, Mr. Lynn was in better health than he had been for several years ; and few

days passed in which Richard did not visit Rillage, or Mr. Lynn visit Herford. The boat, in which Justin and Pansy had so often run along under the cliff to Rillage, was still constantly sailing to and fro ; and the path along the edge of the cliff was as frequently trodden. Diana felt the change more keenly than if all intercourse between the houses had ceased.

Leah had been making the most of her opportunities of studying the customs and manners of gentlefolks. She had Diana as a model ; and though she felt the full difficulty of her task, confidence was usually stronger than despair. Richard took inexhaustible pleasure in Leah, and her airs and graces. She was always " good fun," he said to himself ; and he paid her a good deal of attention, in which she failed to perceive the tone of mockery. He had not forgotten the faithfulness with which she watched for his return ; and he allowed her to believe that it was somehow due to her worthless scraps of paper that he had come into his inheritance. It was November ; the same November that was so foggy and full of gloom for Pansy. Here the days, short as they were, were warm and sunny. The sea was as blue and calm as though the summer was still

cradled on its rippling waves ; for the storms of winter had not yet begun to lash them into rage. The meadows had scarcely a duller green upon them : and the autumn-tinted leaves were fluttering on the sheltered trees. There are no violent changes of the season close down on the edge of the sea, as Herford lay. The cliffs remained the same ; and the black sharp-toothed rocks, over which the tide rolled twice a-day, were no darker or keener in November than in June. It was a month of quiet calm and rest, as if the winter's sleep was stealing on silently and softly to take earth and sky into its embrace. Richard Herford himself was not altogether insensible to the profound peace of this tranquil season, as he was crossing the cliff to Rillage. More than once he stood quite still, gazing absently across the sunny waters, not thinking, but vaguely wishing himself a better man.

He had been standing thus for a minute or two, watching the progress of a three-masted ship with all her sails set, and the white canvas reflected on the water, when he was startled by the sound of Leah Dart's voice close beside him. She was standing by him, dressed in a close imitation of Diana's simple and

unornamented style—a serious sacrifice of taste and feeling for Leah, who preferred bright colours and showy trimmings, but who remained faithful to her model. She was doing her best to attain Diana's light and erect carriage, and Richard, as he turned, found her holding her head stiffly upright.

“Good morning, Mr. Herford,” she said, with an affected smile.

“Good morning, Miss Dart,” he answered, taking off his hat mockingly.

“Ah! now you're makin' fun of me, Master Dick,” she said, blushing crimson. “I know you think I can never make a lady of myself; but I'm a better woman than most of 'em. They're a pack of idle, selfish, good-for-nothing hussies, except Miss Di—fit for nothin' that I know of.”

“So they are, Leah,” he assented good-humouredly.

“I know folks that think me good enough to be a lady,” she continued “those that know a right good woman when they see one. There are folks that are always tellin' me I'm handsome and clever, and could hold up my head with the best. Do you think that's true, Master Dick?”

"Quite true, Leah," he said; "it's truth, when truth is as sober as a judge. I've always been of that opinion myself."

A sudden pallor spread over Leah's brown and red face, and her brilliant black eyes looked at him through tears.

"Oh, Master Dick!" she cried, "do you really think so? I've been tryin' to make myself a lady for your sake. I've loved you all these years, and kept faithful to you, and never let any man court me, nor kiss me—no, not once. It isn't because you are the master of Herford. If you was only a poor workin' man, I'd rather wash your clothes, and cook your victuals, and carry your dinner to the field, than marry the richest man in Lowborough; I would for certain. Oh! do believe me, Master Dick. And it's me that helped you to get your rights, and made you what you are; and I'm tryin' my very best to be a lady like Miss Di, that you think so much of; and I don't eat as much as I want, no more than she eats, and I've left off drinkin' beer, and I walk quiet and soft—and it's all for your sake, Dick!"

Leah's voice faltered with her intense eagerness, and

the colour did not come back to her cheeks as she stood opposite to him, her eyes riveted to his. It was a moment of agony to Leah. The mocking smile certainly passed away from Richard's face, but it changed merely into an expression of blank amazement. There was no answering passion in his eyes ; yet never had he looked so handsome to her.

"Have you taken leave of your senses, Leah Dart?" he asked, after an instant's pause. The tears that had been standing in her eyes rolled in large drops down her cheeks, but they fell unheeded. She felt too wretched to wipe them away, or to conceal them. Richard Herford continued in a kinder and softer tone.

"Indeed, Leah, this is folly," he said ; "such an idea never entered my head. Come, come, give up this silly notion of being a lady ; it only makes you uncomfortable and ridiculous. You are a handsome fine young woman, and be content with that. You may marry very well yet, if you don't look too high."

"I suppose you're too high?" stammered Leah, half angrily and half imploringly.

"Much too high, my good girl," he answered, not unkindly. "I'm not a marrying man, and you'll never see me bringing a new mistress to Herford Court. Women are very pretty creatures in their places, and I'm fond of seeing them when they are as handsome as you—but I've no mind to marry."

"I've waited all these years!" sobbed Leah.

"Don't wait any longer," he said. "I'm awfully vexed you've set your mind upon me; but it's of no use, Leah. There's only one woman I ever saw that I would marry, and she would no more look at me than an angel from heaven. I'll tell you who she is, Leah, and then you'll know there's no chance for me—not if I waited a hundred years. It's Diana Lynn!"

"Miss Di!" exclaimed Leah.

"Yes," he replied, looking down at Rillage Grange, which lay below them, with a disconsolate smile, "I might be a good man yet, if Diana would take me in hand. You can keep a secret, I know, and you will keep that for me. But you get spliced as soon as you can, Leah. There's no chance of having me."

"That's what I mean to do," she answered, wiping her eyes. "I'd sooner wed you than the grandest of 'em all; but if you won't make me a lady, somebody else will. You'll hear of my weddin' very soon, Mr. Herford."

She dropped him a rustic curtsy, half defiantly, and tossed her head as she turned her back upon him, and walked away in a very dignified and lady-like manner—as she flattered herself. Richard watched her till she was out of sight, and then he laughed aloud, till the rooks and sea-gulls on the cliffs around flew out, cawing and screaming with a clamour that drowned his laughter.

CHAPTER XII.

SHE WOULD BE A LADY.

LEAH was not without a definite plan in case of disappointment with Richard. She loved him ; but if her love was lost, why should her ambition be ungratified too ? She hurried back to Rillage Grange, and entered Mr. Lynn's sitting-room with the firm vigorous tread natural to her. He looked up at her with admiration, mingled with a little fear.

"I'm come to give you notice ; I must leave," she said abruptly.

"Then what is to become of me ?" he asked, in a peevish tone. "Do you want me to be killed by bad nursing ?"

"No ; but I'm goin' to leave you," she answered. "There's Miss Di."

"My daughter is not strong enough," he said.

"Come, Leah, you know I cannot part with you. What can I do to keep you?"

"Well, it's not your fault, and it's not my fault," replied Leah, casting her eyes to the ground; "but folks are beginning to talk: they say you ought to have an old woman about you."

Mr. Lynn sat silent, and Leah stood not far from him crying. It was not the first time that the idea of securing Leah by marrying had occurred to him, and he was not altogether averse to it. But there was Diana! How would she feel if he made Leah mistress? He was fond of Leah as his nurse; but as a gentleman he could not help dwelling a little upon the disgrace and ridicule he would bring upon himself by marrying his servant. Yet if she left him it was much the same as having his death-warrant signed and sealed. He had learned to lean upon her more than he did on Diana. She would allow him to run a certain length in his favourite vice, while Diana tried to prevent him taking a single step. Leah could restrain him from fatal excesses, by indulging him a little, but Diana could not restrain him at all.

"It would be the death of me for you to go," he said.

"Nobody can nurse you like me," she answered; "but I've my name and character to look to; it's all I've got. I must go."

"Leah, would anything prevail upon you to stay with me?" he asked, trembling and shivering.

"If you'd make a lady of me," she suggested, feeling that she ventured all on this one chance.

"It's only my daughter I'm thinking of," he answered querulously. "I'd marry you to-morrow but for her."

"It shouldn't make no difference to Miss Di," she replied, with repressed eagerness; "I'm very fond of her, and there should be everything the same. If you'll make me a lady, I'll be true and kind to you, and nurse you better than ever I nursed you before; but, if not, I must go. Choose for yourself."

"You can't go, Leah," he said, "and there's an end of it."

But the end of it, so far as Leah's ambition was concerned, did not come till she was driving from Lowborough to Rillage as Mrs. Lynn some few

weeks later. It was a profound secret as yet, except at the quiet church where they had been married. She heaped warm wrappers about her old husband, and kept both the windows of the carriage closed, though she was herself gasping for the fresh air. But she leaned back with a languid and indifferent air, such as she had noticed in carriage-ladies, and looked out with partially closed eyelids on the narrow glen running down to the sea, of which she was now mistress. It mattered little to Leah that the hedges were broken into gaps and the gates falling from their hinges, or that there was every symptom of bad farming and reckless neglect. The tumbling-down old house did not seem mean to her. She was the lady of Rillage Grange, and her heart was swelling with satisfied ambition. She laid her large strong hand, encased in white kid gloves, upon Mr. Lynn's thin arm, for Leah knew that a bride must wear white gloves, if she had no other bridal finery.

"John," she said, and the old man started as if she had shot him, "I hope you will live a long while."

"I will live as long as I can, my dear," he answered

shortly. Old times had been busy with him, and he had been thinking of his first marriage, with Diana's mother, the last Sir Robert Fortescue's young sister, and the belle of the county. He was unreasonably irritated by Leah calling him John, though she had felt no kind of hesitation in using his Christian name. She was his wife, and meant to be a good wife, but she did not mean to be Mrs. Lynn of Rillage Grange, yet live in it as if she was merely Leah Dart.

She was very kind to him when they reached home, and waited on him, and fussed about him, until he felt that, after all, he had not been guilty of an utter blunder in paying so highly for her care. When he had had a comfortable lunch, and was lying down for a nap on the sofa, she gave a last touch to his pillows.

"John," she said, "I'm goin' to tell Miss Di."

Mr. Lynn felt a twinge of grief for Diana; but he was too comfortable to experience any deep regret. He could not see what difference his second marriage should make to her; Leah would be very much the same as she was before, only there would be no risk of

losing her. At any rate he must leave them to settle the matter between them, and he fell into a gentle doze, being tired with the day's unusual exertion and excitement. His new wife, drawing on her white gloves again, went slowly and somewhat hesitatingly upon her errand, and entered Diana's parlour with a beating heart.

"Miss Di, I have something to tell you," she said respectfully, standing just within the door, for Leah held Diana in a kind of sacred reverence.

"You are not going to leave us, I hope?" answered Diana. She had fancied Leah was growing restless and discontented, and she looked at her earnestly. Her gaudy wedding-bonnet and her white gloves brought a flickering smile to Diana's grave face. Leah stood silent for a minute or two, twisting and untwisting her fingers in evident embarrassment.

"Miss Di," she stammered at last, "we've been married this mornin', but it shan't make no difference to you: I'll wait on you almost like a servant. I've never been in service, and I've always kept to myself, though I've been laughed at for makin' myself a lady.

I've never been at all in company with common folks, Miss Di."

"Who have you married?" asked Diana, smiling.

"I hope it is a good marriage, Leah."

"It's him: your father, Squire Lynn," muttered Leah. "We were married this mornin'."

"My father!" exclaimed Diana. Her head dropped upon her hands, and she was silent, struck dumb with sudden pain and amazement. This was the end then of her long and patient self-sacrifice! She could not help thinking of how she had refused to be Justin's wife, and had spent all her youth and early womanhood at her post as guardian over her father; and now he had set this ignorant and vulgar woman at the head of his house. It was all to end in Leah Dart becoming the wife of his old age.

"Miss Di, why don't you say somethin'?" asked Leah, after a long pause, rapping the table impatiently with her knuckles. This utter silence alarmed and irritated her. "Don't treat me like a baby," she added; "it shan't make any difference to you, I say."

"It must make a difference to me," answered Diana

gravely. She felt bewildered still. The suddenness of the announcement had stunned and shocked her. Yet her clear calm judgment quickly recalled her to the true position of affairs. If what Leah had said was true, it would do no good to resent her father's conduct. "Sit down, Leah," she added; "you are my father's wife, and I cannot behave to you as his nurse only. Let us talk over this change quietly. I do not want to say a word that either you or I might regret. How did you and my father come to think of such a thing?"

"He was afraid of me leavin' him," said Leah, dropping down into the chair which Diana pointed out, "and I wanted to be a lady."

"A lady!" repeated Diana, with a half smile.

"I like to be made much of, as well as other folks," replied Leah, tossing her head, "and do nothing all day but sit in a parlour, and drive about in a carriage, and play music, and paint pictures. Just like you do, Miss Di."

"Why, Leah!" exclaimed Diana, "I would have changed places with you gladly. I wish I had had no duty except to earn my own living. Do you know that

I have never left this house for a single night for fourteen years? I have never been able to have my own friends to visit me here. It is years since I saw the face of any of my brothers and sisters, although I have loved them dearly. My father would not suffer them to come here, and I dare not leave him, no, not for a night. I have been obliged to sit up late to see him safe in his own room, yes, safe in his own bed, before I dare sleep myself. I have never slept soundly and peacefully as you sleep. And now my long task is over I have scarcely a friend in the world. My brothers and sisters are scattered, and have no home to give me."

"You won't go away, Miss Di?" interrupted Leah.

"I never meant to turn you out."

"There is no use in my staying any longer," she said, sadly. "It may have been a useless sacrifice all along, but I believed it to be my duty. I found this cross close at my feet, in my own home, and it seemed to me that I must take it up, and bear it for Christ's sake. Now you will have to bear it, Leah."

"Oh! good sakes!" cried the new wife, bursting into tears, "I'll do my duty as well as I can. I'm

goin' to be a good wife to him, though he's forty years older than me. But don't you go away from your home for me, Miss Di."

"I have a home to go to," said Diana, with a faint flush on her clear pale face, and a smile stealing round her lips; "you have set me free, though you have put yourself into bondage. You'll not be able to come and go as you please."

"Oh, I shall be free enough," answered Leah. "I can manage John, though you can't. I'm going to keep him sober, trust me, now I'm Mrs. Lynn. I'm harder than you, Miss Di; and it'll not fret me to death to hear him cursin' and swearin' and goin' into 'rageous passions. I dare say God Almighty saw I was fitter for it than you; and I'll try and do my duty by him. Couldn't you wish me good luck, just once?"

"My poor girl, I wish you all the happiness you can have," replied Diana; "but do you know how poor my father is? He has barely a hundred a year, and if I had not given him my income he would not have had enough to live upon. He has mortgaged his land so deeply, that almost every penny goes to pay interest.

Do you understand, Leah? We have less than three hundred a year, and two hundred of that is mine, my own. He can give you nothing when he dies, not even the old furniture in this house. There will not be a farthing for you; he has spent all he has already."

Leah's face grew pale. It had never crossed her mind that gentlefolk could be actually poor, though she knew that the place was falling into ruin for want of necessary repairs, and that the whole household establishment consisted of an old servant-woman and a young girl under her. Mr. Lynn had every comfort, and many luxuries: and he always spoke carelessly of expense, as of a thing not to be considered for a moment. Leah stared hard at Diana. She seemed to be conscious, for the first time, of how shabbily she was dressed, and how careful she was of all personal expenditure. Leah clasped her hands together, with an almost tragic gesture of consternation.

"Miss Di," she cried, "is it true? Couldn't he leave me well off, like a lady? Should I have to go to service again if he died? Oh, Miss Di! it's very cruel. He's forty years older than me; and I might have wed

myself well, over and over again, but for thinkin' of bein' a lady. Oh, don't go away, and take your two hundred pounds with you. We couldn't hardly keep a servant if you did, and it's a big house; and it would be hard work to do all the cleanin', and cookin', and wait upon him into the bargain! Oh, Miss Di! if you'll only stay, I'll be just the same as if I wasn't his wife."


"Nonsense, Leah," said Diana, sternly, "you are his wife, and that makes all the difference to me. Do you suppose I could ever forget it? No; I stood nearest to him, and it was my lot to bear the continual burden of his poverty, and sickness, and vice; but you have taken my place—my task is mostly over."

Yet Diana spoke sadly. She had always believed that in spite of all his failings, her father loved her, and leaned upon her as much from affection as from weakness. It was a shock, and a bitter disappointment to her, to discover that he had sunk low enough to practise so much cunning and concealment as to contract a secret marriage with his servant. It was a release to her, but it had not the softening influence accompany-

ing it that would have come with her father's death. Her freedom had a chilly sense of disgrace and chagrin clinging to it.

"Go away now, please," she said, after a pause, to her father's second wife. Leah had been collecting herself while Diana was silent, and considered it would be best to put a good face on the matter, even if it should prove a great blunder. Her little world must not see that she had made a grievous mistake in climbing to the height of her ambition. If marrying a gentleman could make her a lady, then she was one assuredly; and who had ever heard tell of a Mrs. Lynn of Rillage Grange going out to service? Such a thing could not be, it must be impossible! Still, she felt herself at sea, in unknown currents. She dropped a deeper curtsey than usual to Miss Di before quitting the room.

"If you please, Miss Di," she said, humbly, "I mean to make him a good wife anyhow. I've took him for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer; and I'll stand to it. I know Uncle Fosse 'll say it's the Lord's doings; for I am fitter to manage him than you ever was, Miss Di."



CHAPTER XIII.


"IS IT GOOD NEWS?"

A FEW evenings later Justin was walking slowly along the frosty road leading homewards from the nearest station, under the starry darkness of a wintry sky. He had been intensely happy all day in his office, for the one thing denied to him in his days of prosperity was now falling into his hand. He had missed Diana's companionship sorely. Until this complete separation he had not known how entirely dependent he was upon her sympathy and appreciation. Pansy was scarcely a companion to him, she felt no interest in his thoughts or work, and his work was growing more and more congenial to him, as it brought him into contact with many minds. With Diana, and with this constant stir of intellectual life, so different from the stagnation at Herford, he should feel that he had gained, instead of losing, by the surrender of Richard's birthright.

But as he loitered along the road he could not close his heart to some intrusive dread as to how Pansy

would receive Diana as her mother. He had always been told that she was a spoiled child, and that he spoiled her, and he was not quite sure that this was not true. He felt a chivalrous devotion to his daughter. She had been the first object on whom he had been able to lavish the passionate tenderness of his heart, for his first marriage had been a mistake of his boyhood. Pansy, his little motherless child, with her utter dependence upon him, and her pretty baby ways, had struck a chord that had never ceased to vibrate. If she was not happy, he could not be.

He had been very anxious about her of late. The first cold of the winter had nipped her, as it had nipped the blossoms in the garden. Justin felt through every fibre of his being, that Pansy was sick both in body and mind, though she made vain attempts to be the shadow of the merry, light-hearted girl she had been a year ago. He had called in a doctor, who had told him she was suffering from nostalgia, which he could remember as attacking himself, in all its subtle force, whenever he was absent, as a boy, from Herford. But Pansy would not listen for a moment to any mention of going back to Herford Court. She



laughed at the idea of home-sickness, and assured her father he was troubling himself for nothing. But nevertheless Justin was troubled.

What could he do if she steadily set her face against Diana? He could hardly breathe as he thought of it. It would be dooming his delicate little Pansy to death to force her into any conflict like this. If it should prove a fresh grief to her, after all the storm of trouble that had been beating against her, what must he do? Diana could no longer live at home, and he could not give her up. She must come to him now at last. If Pansy had been about to marry Robert Fortescue, how timely this last event of Mr. Lynn's marriage would have been. That cruel blow was the true secret of Pansy's illness.

It was near the close of the year, a December night, frosty and clear, with the stars glittering, and the hoar-frost pencilling out every leaf on the bushes and brambles, and every blade of grass on the forest. He paced to and fro under the bare chestnut-trees, looking up to the lighted windows of the little room where she was waiting for him, and wondering what kept him away so late. At length, weary of his own wavering, he rang

the bell and rushed quickly upstairs, so quickly that Pansy was not quite prepared for him. She was leaning back languidly in her easy-chair, with her eyes closed, but as he entered she sprang up with a welcome of forced gaiety. He took her chair, and drew her on to his knee, as if she was still a little child.

"I have some news for you, my darling," he said.


"Good news?" murmured Pansy, her colour going and coming, and her heart beating fast under his arm. She had only one idea of good news. Had he seen Robert? Was it all going to be right again? She believed that if he and her father could only see one another, all must come right.

"I hope so; nay, I am sure it is good news," he answered. "You are not going to be left alone much longer. I have found a companion for you."

"Is Jenny coming?" asked Pansy with a dreary sigh.

"No, not Jenny; Diana," he said, afraid to look into his daughter's face.

"Diana!" she repeated, clasping her hands—"oh, father! I am so glad. She will help me to be good."



I've not been very good lately, I know. Did you really say Diana?"

"Yes, my darling," he said, delightedly. "Diana, our Diana! Do you love her?"

"Oh, yes!" she answered with fervour, "I love her next to you, only a very, very long way below you, father. Almost next to you," she said, her pale face growing red again as she remembered her love to Robert. "How soon will she come?" she asked after a while, with her hands on his shoulders and her shining eyes looking eagerly into his. "Is she coming directly?"

"Directly," he repeated in a tone of unconscious gladness, "for her father has married Leah Dart."

"Oh, how horrible!" cried Pansy. "Why do men marry again, ever, father? You have never married again."

Justin felt himself silenced by this unfortunate question. He stroked Pansy's pretty head, which was now lying on his shoulder, whilst he sought for words in which to explain himself. He was fearful of wounding her, and it was evident that she had no idea of what he wished to say.

"My darling," he said caressingly, "I should have married Diana years ago, when you were almost a baby, if she would have left her father. But she would never leave him to sink into lower degradation, though I could have shielded her from every sorrow. I can shield you both from trouble, or, at least, I can share trouble with you. You will not be one whit less dear to me, Pansy, when Diana is my wife."

"Do you love her very much?" asked Pansy. Her lips were close to his ear, and he could not see her face, but her heart was throbbing faster than ever.

"More than words could tell," he answered.

"Are you happy?" she whispered again.

"Happier than I could tell," he said. "Diana will be your mother, my darling. You will take her for your mother? my only fear is for you."

"Don't be afraid for me," she answered. "I love her very, very dearly; only a long, long way below you, father."

But as the evening wore away, Pansy's large bright eyes watched her father more wistfully than ever. She had never regarded him in any other light than as her father, and she had not criticized or scanned his face

so closely. Now she was looking at him through Diana's eyes, and she wondered at herself that she had never guessed the love between them. And they had had the patience and the faithfulness to wait all this time for one another ! It was the patience Pansy knew she should lack, not the faithfulness.

She could not grudge her father his happiness, yet it made her own lot more blank. It seemed another element in the strangeness that surrounded her. There was a feeling of distance creeping in between her and him, as she thought of his marrying again, even though Diana was going to be his wife. How was she to behave when he was no longer simply her father ? When she met his eyes she made haste to smile back upon him as if she, too, was rejoicing, but she felt a sorrowful forlornness all the while. Pansy cried herself to sleep that night. Her heart was restless, and even this once stable and unchanging love was growing an uncertain resting-place for it.

CHAPTER XIV.

DISMAL CONGRATULATIONS.

THERE was no reason for delay, and Justin and Diana were married during January in Herford Church, as Rillage Grange was just within the parish boundaries. The marriage was kept so close a secret, that no one but old Fosse was admitted to witness the ceremony. Diana's father gave her away with many misgivings as to the exchange he had made in taking Leah Dart in her place, and Leah herself was present at Diana's own request. It was an intense satisfaction to her to sign her name as witness in the parish registrar, Leah Lynn; it was the first time she had had occasion to write it, and her fingers could hardly hold the pen. Fosse signed his name in large crabbed characters, and clasped his hard knotty hands over the book as he was used to do over his Bible.

"Now the Lord love them and bless them!" he

said. "Surely it's a great mystery! Ay, it's an unspeakable mystery that men like us, wi' our angers and tempers and sins, should stand to our wives in the same place as our Lord to His church! Yet it's true! we live and toil for our wives at home, and life and labour 'ud be unbearable if we hadn't them to think of. And the Lord's life of toil and sufferin', what would that have been, if he hadn't borne it for His people that He loves? It would have broken His heart long before He came to Calvary and the cross. There's only two women here," he continued, looking round at Diana and Leah, with a smile lighting up his wrinkled face, "but let every one of us in particular so love his wife even as himself."

"That is what I have always done, and shall continue to do," said Mr. Lynn, turning to Justin. "Diana has always been a good daughter, and I trust to you to make her a good husband. We will bid you farewell here, and wish you all happiness. You are going up to the Court to inform Mrs. Herford of this event?"

"Yes," answered Justin, "we must not leave without seeing my mother."

But there was no pleasure in the fulfilment of this duty. The secret had been kept from her, or otherwise it would have been no secret; but they knew what reproaches they would have to meet. As yet it had not oozed out even in the village, and by going at once to Herford Court, they would prevent it reaching her through any other means. The house seemed quiet and desolate as they drove into the old courtyard, and alighted at the ancient doorway. Richard was away from home, and the place was empty of guests; even Jenny Cunliffe was not allowed, on any pretext, to visit at Herford Court; though a desirable situation had not yet been found for her. Justin led Diana through the place, no longer his own, to the sitting room, where he had heard old Richard Herford's will read; and there sat his mother, disconsolately reading an old novel, and surrounded by unbroken stillness.

"Good gracious, Justin!" she ejaculated as they entered; "Justin and Diana Lynn!" she added; but words failed her as her elder son, after kissing her smooth cheek, introduced Diana to her as his wife.

"Your wife!" she repeated, gasping with amazement and incredulity.

"We were married this morning," Justin hastened to explain, "and are just come from the church to tell you before any one else knew. Diana promised to be my wife eleven years ago; and now her father has married again, she felt herself free to keep her promise. Mother, we have loved each other dearly these eleven long years."

"Well! well!" exclaimed Mrs. Herford ungraciously, but kissing Diana's offered cheek, "I always thought there was something in the background. You've been very close about it, though it will not make much difference to me as it is; and I wish you joy. Oh yes, I wish you joy. Though how you are to live on such an income as you have, Justin, is quite a mystery to me. Pansy, too. I wonder how Pansy will like it. Now you'll learn how unreasonable children are in setting their faces against second marriages. You never liked me marrying again, and you're going to have the same trouble I had. However, it is your own affair; and I congratulate you with all my heart, I'm sure."

She tossed back her lace lappets, and stroked her hair with her white hand as she was wont to do. Except for an additional line or two on her smooth round forehead, she looked precisely as she had done since her husband's death.

"I should have liked to have known you were going to be married," she said peevishly; "it is disagreeable to be taken by surprise in this way. My own son, too! There is so little stirring just at present, it would have been quite a diversion to decorate the church, and get up a breakfast. Some of the county people would have come on Diana's account. I dare say Sir John Fortescue might have been prevailed upon. But you never did ask my opinion, Justin, or you would never have taken the estate, and then given it up again, as you did. I never knew anybody make such blunders as you do."

"I have made no blunder to-day," he said joyously. His mother's peevishness had no power to touch his happiness.

"That remains to be proved," she resumed. "When poverty comes in at the door, love flies out at the window! You might have been such a comfort to me!

Richard invites all the riff-raff of the country here—racing men, and blacklegs, and mountebanks of every description—and then he tells me I'm too old to mix with his friends, they are not used to old women! Those are his very words, I assure you. He says my place is to look after the maids and the cooking, as if I was only his housekeeper. And Justin, I can't get him to pay me my income, and there are two quarters passed, and he owes me *two hundred and fifty pounds*, and he says he has not a penny to spare. And now you have married again; and I have no comfort in either of my sons."

She melted into tears at the recital of her own griefs. There was a dim misgiving in her mind that Justin would expect some handsome wedding present from her; and she was feeling miserably poor, as well as lonely. Richard was not paying her allowance, and he was squandering money away on frivolous and unworthy objects. The prosperity of Herford, so carefully built up by Justin, was already in danger of being destroyed by Richard's extravagance.

"I will write to Richard," he said.


"I don't believe he will ever do any good," moaned

his mother. "Twenty times a day I'm wishing you and Pansy were back again. I was mistress then, and I will say that for Pansy, that she never flew in my face, though you spoiled her so. Poor Pansy! she is going to pay for her happy times now, with a step-mother. Don't interrupt me, Justin. Of course she is all perfection in your eyes; and I dare say she is perfect; but all the same, Pansy will not like it. Diana will pardon a grieved and disappointed mother for speaking out plainly."

"Pansy and I know each other well, and love each other dearly," said Diana, gently.

"Oh yes!" she answered, shaking her head; "but nobody ever did love a step-mother, you know. I don't know what would have been done, if Justin had brought you here. I could not have given up the position my poor dear husband left me; and there could not have been two mistresses of Herford Court."

"What will you do if Richard marries?" asked Justin. "Mr. Herford's will only gave you a right to a home in the house; it did not make you absolute mistress of it. You must not expect that Richard's wife will not be sole mistress here."



"In that case I should go," cried Mrs. Herford, bursting into tears again. "My sons would drive me out of house and home. Oh, Diana! pray that you may have no children to make your old age bitter. You would set your wife over me, Justin!"

"I should certainly make my wife mistress of my home," he replied, almost angrily; "but do not let that imaginary grievance vex you now, mother. We can stay no longer, for we must catch the train at twelve; but we thought it right to come up to see you before leaving."

"It would have been very odd," she answered, "if my own son was married, and I was the last person to know of it. I wish you joy; and more dutiful children than I have. Richard ran away on the sly, and you are married on the sly! What did I ever do to have such sons? But I forgive you, Justin. May you never experience the bitterness of a lonely old age!"

They left her in tears, after receiving from her a chilly kiss and a sobbing good-bye. As they passed along the familiar passages and hall to the door, both looked grave and troubled; but Justin catching

Diana's eyes lifted to his face, smiled down on her with a tender though deprecating smile.

"My mother!" he ejaculated, in an apologetic tone.

"And my father!" she said, an answering smile breaking upon her clouded face. "We must be patient with them both. We are happy enough to bear with them all, and with one another. We are to share one another's burdens."

"I will bear yours now you belong to me," he said fondly, as he wrapped her up carefully from the winter's cold. "Mine at last!" he added. "I'm happy enough now to bear a heavy burden."

CHAPTER XV.

REAPING THE HARVEST.

NO one had been more surprised at old Mr. Lynn's second marriage than Richard Herford; but it had been also a source of considerable amusement to him. Leah's efforts to be quite a lady continued to afford him constant entertainment; and when the check of Diana's presence was removed, he visited Rillage Grange more frequently. He thought Justin a lucky fellow to have won Diana in spite of his poverty, and his downfall in the world; but he had indulged no hope of winning her himself, and there was no insincerity in the hearty though somewhat melancholy congratulations he sent to them. Justin was having the best of it again, he thought to himself. As he crossed to and fro along the cliffs from Herford to Rillage, he often stood on the point from which he could see the greater portion of his lands, looking at

them with a dissatisfied heart. He knew he was extravagant; but he could not be so reckless as he had been when his sudden spurts of good fortune put him in possession of funds, which were as lightly lost as they had been lightly won. To lose now was to lose the property, for which a long line of ancestors had toiled and schemed; and he had natural feeling enough to grudge that loss. He hated to feel that the acres would slip through his fingers as surely as the coins had done before: yet he could not deny himself, or turn his nature into another channel. He must have a merry life, at any cost.


In the meantime he tried to gain as much merriment as sufficed for him at Rillage Grange, where Leah always made him welcome. She took good care that her husband should not sink into any excess that might endanger his life and her own position; but she could not find it in her heart to refuse Richard anything she could get for him. Though Diana had shared her little fortune with her father, still allowing him half her yearly income, Leah did not find it any easy task to be the lady of Rillage Grange on two hundred a year. It was not very pleasant to be a lady on means so small,

and with all the neighbourhood, even her own old friends, turning the cold shoulder upon her. She found herself very much alone, and she could not help welcoming every visit from the handsome scapegrace whom she had helped back to his estates, and for whom she still felt a lurking fondness. Mr. Lynn himself urged him to come often, almost with tears in his eyes.

Mrs. Herford had suffered many hardships during her life, but she had never suffered one so cruel as to be compelled to invite Leah Dart to Herford Court. Old Martha Dart had been goose-girl, and Leah herself, in her girlhood, had tended the geese upon the cliffs. It was an unheard-of degradation to entertain her as a guest. But Richard was inexorable, and Leah enjoyed nothing so greatly as visiting at Herford Court. There was quite a close relationship between her and Mrs. Herford, since her step-daughter Miss Di, had become Mrs. Herford's daughter-in-law ; and she never failed to communicate the contents of Diana's letters to her father. She almost drove Mrs. Herford to distraction by speaking of her sons as Justin and Dick ; though Richard only laughed good-temperedly

when she complained to him about it. It was in vain that Mrs. Herford assumed her most distant and haughty manners ; Leah had a native confidence which was quite a match for any fine lady-like airs. She was strong in the consciousness that she was Mrs. Lynn, of Rillage Grange ; and if her dress was not so costly or so tasteful as the elder lady's, it was much more gaudy, and, in Leah's own eyes, much grander.

Mrs. Cunliffe, humble as she felt it her duty to be, fully shared Mrs. Herford's indignation and her disdain of Mrs. Lynn. She seldom failed to obey any summons from her dear old friend, though Jenny was not permitted by her father to set a foot within the doors of Herford Court. Richard respected his clergyman and avoided him. But he had readily guessed the secret of Jenny's exclusion, if his mother's petulant complaints had not revealed her suspicions of Mrs. Cunliffe's ambitious hopes, and for sheer want of amusement, he made the pursuit of little Jenny Cunliffe his favourite pastime. It cost Mr. Cunliffe many a sleepless hour ; but never did mother rejoice more in secret over the success of her tactics ; while Mrs. Herford was terrified beyond measure at the idea of Richard bringing a wife



to Herford Court, and that wife being Jenny Cunliffe.

The new position to which she had climbed was by no means sweet to Leah. The bondage borne so patiently by Diana, was a very real burden. Now that she was left to the sole companionship and management of her old husband, the confinement became close, and the work hard. She had looked on and thought that Diana had little to do but amuse herself; but she found that she had fulfilled a circle of daily duties which now fell upon her. There were no more long hours in which she could safely leave Mr. Lynn under a careful guardianship and walk over to Herford to visit her infirm and grumbling mother, or her aunt Fosse; and this was a real grief to her. Faithfulness was the groundwork of poor Leah's character; it was natural and instinctive to her. She had satisfied her ambition, but she could not endure the thought of seeming to forsake her friends. Her mother was almost a disgrace to her, yet she could not without much pain refrain from paying her frequent visits.

She had besides harder work to do, drudging toil, and labour, which tested her physical strength severely.

For Leah was no slattern, and she did not like to see dust gathering upon the furniture, which would be hers at least as long as Mr. Lynn lived. The young maid-servant had been dismissed, and Leah had double duty to do. There were nights of wakefulness and watchfulness, and days of toil and care. The whole responsibility of keeping her husband free from excesses, which would have proved fatal to him, fell upon her. She began to lose bulk and colour, partly to her alarm, and partly to her gratification. The long and narrow old-fashioned mirrors reflected to her scrutinizing eyes a face growing paler and more careworn, and a frame visibly lessening. She fancied that she was getting more like Miss Di, with her clear colourless complexion, and her air of patrician refinement. But she could not help feeling, in spite of all, that she was paying a higher price than she had reckoned on for the object of her ambition.

At last, one morning in May, she ventured to leave Rillage Grange, to go over to Herford, and spend the day with her mother. She had never been able to stay long with her since the time of Diana's marriage, and many a querulous message had reached her. It was

by no means a pleasant duty to face the old woman, and sit listening to her complaints. Now her daughter was a lady she could not understand why she had not money enough to provide lavishly for all her wants and fancies, and Leah had not the heart to tell her that she had scarcely a shilling she could use as she pleased. At last she grew weary of sitting in the dark little cottage, listening to her mother's grumblings, and as the afternoon wore on, she announced her intention of going to have tea with her aunt Fosse.

It seemed a strange thing to Leah to walk down the village street again, nodding to one old neighbour after another, who stood and watched her enviously from the cottage doors, but gave her no very cordial greeting. It made her feel somewhat sore at heart, though she tossed her head higher, and stepped more mincingly than usual. She was a little worn and downcast this sunny afternoon. Her gay spirits were gone, and her vigorous bodily health was going too. This was to be a lady. She had had her own way, but it did not prove a very smooth or prosperous way. The children rushing noisily out of school and climbing the hedgerows, or scampering down to the beach, and the mothers calling

them in to tea, struck a deep and melancholy chord within her. There would never more be any life like this for her, full of innocent pleasures, and work that was no drudgery, done always for love, and not for wages. To keep home for a husband and for children dear to her, to labour for them because she loved them, would not be her lot. She had had her choice, and had chosen foolishly.

Leah hardly put her vague and forlorn feeling into words, but it was none the less there. Rillage Grange, with its large old empty rooms, and its lonely silence, was on her mind as she stepped into her aunt Fosse's spotless and shining kitchen, with its door opening upon the garden, and the sunshine glistening on its shelves of crockery, and burnished brass candlesticks on the high mantelpiece. She sank down wearied into the arm-chair on the hearth, with its well-stuffed cushions, soft with the feathers of her aunt's famous poultry, and covered with many-coloured patchwork put together by her aunt's fingers. This was a very palace of homely comfort, and one like it had formerly been within Leah's reach. Mrs. Fosse busied herself in getting tea, and while Leah looked on, with her black

eyes glistening through tears, her aunt made ready the little round table, and watched the kettle for the first symptoms of boiling, to secure the earliest bubbling of the water to make the tea, and to prevent any drops splashing her clean hearth. Leah breathed a heavy and very bitter sigh.

"Look out, and see if uncle's comin', my dear," said Mrs. Fosse, hearing the sigh, but passing it over as not to be talked about, "and give him a call if you see him."

Leah stood for a few moments on the door-sill, shading her eyes with her hand, and looking out on a scene as old as her earliest childhood to her. There was nothing new in the little garden, or the green meadow beyond, or the peep of the sea through a fork of the cliffs. The cluck of the hens calling their chickens, and the blissful grunting of the pig basking in the sunshine were as old to her. But she had never stood at the cottage door with tear-bedimmed eyes, and a failing heart, as now. Why had she not been content with the chance of such a home as this? She might have married some one who had loved her, and who would have grown old with her, as her uncle and aunt had grown

old together. But she belonged neither to her own folks nor to gentlefolks, as it was, and no husband or child would go on into old age with her, and brighten up those chilly days. She had made a terrible mistake.

Mrs. Fosse was inclined to make more of Leah, seeing her in such low spirits. She broiled some rashers of the bacon Mrs. Cunliffe coveted, and poached some of her famous eggs for tea. How delicious the food tasted to Leah, in the pleasant cottage kitchen, with the kettle singing a tune upon the hob, and the spring breezes blowing in through the open door, salt and fresh from the sea ! Mr. Lynn was particular about his meals, and she was obliged to prepare richer and less simple food at Rillage Grange for him, and they were eaten in larger rooms, but then she felt compelled to sit up straight and stiff, and take care lest she brought down some cutting reproof from her husband, who had been accustomed to see Diana at the head of his table. Oh, how foolish she had been !

“ Master Dick came back from London last night,” remarked old Fosse, as they sat at tea. “ He’s been seein’ Master Justin, thank the Lord ! There shouldn’t

be no enmity betwixt them, for they're all but brothers. He says our Miss Pansy's as white as a lily, and her little hands are like eggshells. She's pinin' away, he's afraid, and she won't hear of coming back to Herford."

"Oh, Jeremy!" cried his wife, "can't nothin' be done? Miss Pansy's like our own child, poor little motherless blossom! It'll be a sore grief to every one of us, if anything mischances Miss Pansy. It's likely she'll pine, leaving Herford for London, where there's no good air, no good victuals, nor good milk and eggs. Couldn't she come home again?"

"Master Diek's been talkin' to me," replied old Fosse. "He's not all bad, isn't Master Dick, and maybe he'll turn to the Lord some day. He says he'll go clear away for the summer, and leave Herford Court for Master Justin, if he'll come to it for three or four months. It 'ud be like old times again."

"It can't ever be like old times again," said Mrs. Fosse, sadly.

"Did he say anything about my daughter—Miss Di?" inquired Leah. It was one of the sweets of her elevation to dwell upon the close connection she had

with Diana, who was always kind to her, and treated her as her father's wife.


"Of course he'd see Mrs. Justin Herford," said her aunt severely, "but I never heard of any daughter of yours, Leah. To marry a drunken old noodle does not make you the mother of a lady like Miss Di, Leah Dart."

"Come, come," interposed old Fosse, rising from the tea-table, "let by-gones be by-gones. Leah can't unwed herself, if she wished it ever so. We must reap as we sow, but don't let us hurry on the harvest. Leah, you come along wi' me to the Lantern-hill."

CHAPTER XVI.

WHO'S AT THE HELM?


OLD Fosse had seen the tears in Leah's eyes and the wanness of her face, and his warm heart ached for her. This was the time, he thought, when perhaps a word in season might win her from folly to wisdom. It was yet a long way off sunset, for May days are in no hurry to close, even when the winds are bitter enough to make us long for the cosy warmth of wintry firesides. The shadows were growing deeper on the eastern clefts and ravines of the cliffs, but the sunny surfaces fronting westward were thrown into higher relief by them. The coast, where it caught the light, was bathed in splendour, and the yellow gorse upon the cliffs shone like gold. There had been a fresh north-westerly breeze blowing over the sea for some hours, and during the heat of the day it had been



warm and welcome. The whole field of sea, stretching far away to a distant line, was flecked with silvery ripples, threatening by-and-by to break into waves ; and the foam was leaping into snowy flakes up the sides of the swarthy rocks. Low down on the horizon lay a long line of grey clouds, broken and tumbled together, with cross-bars of a dull leaden hue intersecting them. It was not yet cold, but there was a chilliness creeping landwards from the sea which foretold a coming storm.

Old Fosse and Leah pursued their way to the lighthouse in silence, and were still silent when they gained the little platform of rock beneath its walls, from which they could see a long line of coast, ending on each side with a headland stretching into the sea, and there joining the long line of clouds which lay almost like mimic cliffs beyond the dim blue of the water. Cliff, and sea, and sky were all that could be seen.

“ Ah ! there's sorrow on the sea, and it cannot be quiet,” said Old Fosse, “ but it seemed as if I loved it all the more, and thought of it all the more, for the sorrow. It 'ud seem strange if it was always at rest and quiet ; it wouldn't be like this world, Leah. Maybe the Lord loves us the more for the sorrow we have, that



cannot let us be quiet, 'specially you young things, as haven't learned to find rest in Him."


"Uncle Fosse," sobbed Leah, "I've been pretty nigh wishin' all day as I'd never wed Squire Lynn. It's all turned out pride and vexation," she added, after a mournful pause ; "but if I repented ever so, I couldn't ever be different; I couldn't unwed myself. I should have to keep on bein' his wife, and never have a good man like you for my master, to love me and work for me, as you do for aunt. It's poor consolation to call Miss Di my daughter and make believe I'm a lady, when I'm harder worked than I ever was. I'm like a dog at a fair, dressed up in a scarlet coat and a hat, and walking on two legs. Nobody thinks he isn't a dog. Master Dick laughs and makes game of me, and Mrs. Herford never speaks a word to me if she can help it, when I go to dinner there. But if I repented, what 'ud be the good? It 'ud be all the same; and I'm a miserable woman."

"No, no, Leah, my lass," said the old man tenderly, "it all depends upon whether you are sorry of your sin, or of your punishment! If you repent of your pride and folly God can take those away, and make you wise and humble. And your punishment wouldn't be all the


same, if you could believe God was watchin' over you, and carin' for you, and lovin' you with all His heart. For it's with all His heart God loves us. He doesn't say to us, 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart,' and then only give us a bit of His own love. No, no, Leah. All His might, all His strength, all His heart, that's how Jesus loved his disciples; and that's how He loves us still. You didn't know what you might have been, when you wished to be a lady. Why! you might have been one of the daughters of the Lord God Almighty! What is a lady to that? Miss Di herself thinks nothin' of bein' a lady, because she knows she is one of God's children. And so may I, and so may you, my lass! There's neither high nor low, rich nor poor in His sight. He couldn't love the Queen herself more than with all His heart."

Leah could not answer. She knew that her uncle Fosse had talked like this before, but it seemed as if she had been deaf, and could not hear his words. But she heard them now; and oh! could she believe them? would God forgive all her folly and pride?

She looked tearfully across the tossing sea, towards the cliffs under which lay her new home, where life was



so difficult. The little cove at Rillage, for it was hardly a bay, was not in sight, but she saw a boat coming round the rock which hid it; the Herford boat, once Justin's, now Richard's. Richard had rigged it with a saffron-coloured sail, distinct from every other sail along that coast. In the westerling light it looked like a gorgeous butterfly flitting over the soft dim blue of the sea, and catching the sunshine on its flame-coloured wings. She watched it listlessly for a few minutes, sobbing now and then like a chidden child. Then her thoughts began to stir. Richard had visited Rillage Grange whilst she had been away; and there would be no one at hand to check either him or her husband, who was likely enough to avail himself of his unwonted freedom. It was the first holiday she had taken since her marriage, and what if it ended badly! She had married Mr. Lynn with her eyes open, knowing him to be a drunkard and irreclaimable. There was no hope of his growing any more temperate, or of keeping from fatal excesses, unless he was closely watched, as Miss Di had watched him. Well! if God would only forgive her, she would bear with him, and have patience with him; and do her utmost to be a good wife to him.



"Uncle Fosse," she said sorrowfully, "I must be goin' home now."

Yet she did not turn away at once, but followed the flutterings of the saffron sail for a minute or two. The tide was in Richard's favour, though the wind was against him; but the little boat was performing some unaccountable manœuvres. It was hovering dangerously near a long line of reef, which was covered at high tide, but which was beginning to show its black and pointed crest through the surf that danced and wavered along it. Near to it the rocks were worn into deep parallel furrows, over which the sea swirled to and fro, as it rose and fell, and bounded at last tumultuously against the foot of the high precipice, upon the brow of which lay the little path to Rillage. There was a strong eddy just there at any time, but at this time, with the tide flowing, and the wind pressing heavily upon the water, it was more than usually dangerous. Yet apparently Richard Herford had loosed the sail; and the little boat was reeling and staggering in the current, with its sail almost dipping into the water.

"I can't think what Master Dick can be about,"

said Leah in an anxious tone, "see how his boat's bobbin' up and down. Who can be steerin', uncle?"

"He'd little Johnny Tucker wi' him," answered old Fosse, "when he set out. Johnny's a good steersman, lad as he is; but I'll run in and fetch my glass. It's just inside the porch here."

Leah could not take her eyes off the boat, whilst old Fosse was searching for it with his telescope among the rocks. At last he fixed it within the range of his glass; and he cried out in a voice of alarm.

"Why! it's old Mr. Lynn at the rudder," he exclaimed, "and Master Dick's tryin' to get it out of his hand. Johnny isn't there. They'll be borne on to the rocks. Good Lord! good Lord!"

The last words were spoken in a tone of entreaty, as if he saw one who could help, and was crying to him to stretch out his hand.

"They're fightin'!" he cried, "fightin' for the rudder! They don't see where they are goin'. Are they mad, Leah, or drunk?"

Leah lifted up her voice, and uttered a long, shrill, piercing cry of warning; but the wind bore the sound inland, against the cliffs. Yet almost as if in answer

to it a loud call for help reached their ears. The sail, all aflame with the evening sunshine, and swelling with the western wind, was drifting down fast into the furrows and deep hollows of the rocks.

“Quick! quick!” cried old Fosse, “there’s my boat down below. Iv’e a strong arm yet, and so have you, Leah. There’s not a moment to lose.”

The fishing-boat was moored at the foot of a rude staircase cut in the rock; and it was not a minute’s work to seize the oars, and push out through the tangle of wrack into clearer water. Leah had not spoken since she had uttered her wild ineffectual scream; and she did not speak now. All her strength was needed for the oar; though the languor and weakness she had felt all day seemed replaced by a marvellous vigour. The salt spray sprinkled her face, as it had done thousands of times, but it brought no colour back to its deadly pallor. She had her back to the point whither they were rowing; but from time to time she glanced round, and searched the waters for the glowing and fluttering sail. As long as it was in sight there was hope that all would be right; but how slowly was their clumsy fishing-boat making its way against the tide!

how long it was before they could get away from the current which flowed round the Lantern-hill! Leah heard old Fosse murmuring a prayer, but her throat was too dry to say, "Amen."

He was sitting on the bench before her, and she saw his face as he turned round to look towards the boat. An expression of terror was stamped upon it. He turned back, and bent himself with desperate effort to his oar; and Leah did the same. Were they to be too late?

"Lord! have mercy on their souls!" she heard him say in an awe-struck under-tone.

It seemed to Leah as if these muttered words compelled her to look round, though she must lose a stroke of her oar. There rose up in terrible array the steep inaccessible cliffs, all bathed in light, with little birds flitting about the golden gorse, and the glossy ivy that grew in every crevice. The sky was smiling overhead with a deeper blue than it had ever worn since the winter's greyness. All along the summit of the cliffs rang the songs of the thrushes, and the clear whistle of the blackbird, and the busy twitter of the finches; not silent for an instant, though human voices were being

hushed in death. She could hear the cattle being called, and the tinkle of sheep-bells in the meadows above her. But she heard and saw as one who hears and sees not. Only one sight was clear to her : the amber sail drifting on the tossing waves, and the boat breaking to pieces on the sharp point of the rock that had pierced it through.


CHAPTER XVII.

FACING DEATH.

OLD Fosse and Leah rowed on in unbroken silence.

The splash of the waves against their boat was the only sound that Leah heard, though her ear was strained to catch the sound of voices calling for help. No call came across the water, though they were near enough to hear it, if there had been any. The boat was held fast by the tooth of rock, and it was probable that one or both of the men in it might be clinging to it for safety : though the white foam was tossing over it, as if in triumphant delight over a new toy. The silence was an ominous answer to this hope ; and as they came near enough, they saw that it was empty.

Leah stood up on the bench, and looked around. Beyond the reef, closer under the cliffs, was a channel, comparatively smooth, and beyond that a strip of sand, lying below the overhanging cliff. The slanting light



of the sun fell brightly on the yellow sand, and she could see, flung upon it like a weed, the body of Richard Herford—she was near enough to know that it was Richard. A few moments brought the boat through the straight smooth channel to the sand ; and she sprang out of it, and ran eagerly to his side. A low moan as she tried to move him made her start again to her feet.

“ He’s not dead ! ” she shouted to her uncle, as he fastened his boat ; “ it’s Master Dick, and he’s not dead.”

She shaded her eyes with her hands to look out steadily over the glistening sea ; but there was no other form to be seen. If her husband had, indeed, been in the boat, he was lost. But Fosse was beside her now, and bending over Richard Herford ; and she had not time yet to think of the old man whose wife she had been. Fosse knelt down, and placed his arm under Richard to raise him a little ; but the sharp agony he seemed to suffer made him desist. This was not the unconsciousness merely of a half-drowned man : some deeper injury had befallen him.

“ We must move him higher,” said he ; “ as high as

we can. It's nigh on three hours to high tide. We can't carry him to th' boat; and th' boat can't come nigher. We must lift him higher on th' sands, Leah; it's as much as we can do, that is."

It taxed their strength to the utmost; for Leah was exhausted, and old Fosse was unused to lifting heavy burdens. Richard was utterly helpless and unconscious, though now and then he groaned as they moved him by degrees into a spot of greater safety. Then they stood and looked at one another in questioning bewilderment. What were they to do now?

"Leah, my lass!" said old Fosse, "couldst thee trust in God enough to bide here wi' him, whilst I run back and fetch th' menfolk? There's time and to spare; plenty o' time. But it 'ill be fearsome; if thee canst na' trust in God. Or wilt thee come wi' me, and leave him? Maybe that 'ud be a wiser thing to do; only it 'ud be a fearsome thing for him to wake up and find himself alone. He'd know nothin' of any one havin' gone for help."

"I'll stay. I can't quit him," answered Leah briefly. She helped her uncle to push off his boat, and watched it floating away from her down the channel; but before

it was out of sight, or beyond the reach of her voice, she roused herself.

“Bid them get a bed ready for Master Dick,” she shouted, “and send for Dr. Vye. Rillage is nigher Lowborough than Herford. Go to Rillage,” she called, till the cliffs rang with her voice.

“Ay! ay!” cried old Fosse in reply.

Slowly she retraced her steps to Richard's side, and stood looking upon his death-like face. Then she stooped and covered it with her handkerchief, partly to hide it from herself, and partly to screen it from the light of the setting sun which shone brilliantly into the low arch of the rock in which they had laid him. Leah had seen a picture of a sepulchre in eastern lands; and this arch looked to her like a grave, with Richard lying corpse-like in it. She shivered as she thought of it, in spite of the warm sunlight. It was warm still, for the rock reflected the heat; and the sand was hot and dry. The flies were buzzing about, and the bees were humming just above the low-roofed arch. She sat down on the sand, and laid her fingers on Richard's wrist, where the pulse was throbbing fitfully. He was certainly alive.


Then her thoughts went away to her husband : the old man she had left only a few hours ago in his usual health. He had bid her good-bye in a jeering mocking tone, his only weapon against her and her authority ; and she had flung away out of the room, too angry to answer him. And she was never to hear his voice again. She would no longer be Mrs. Lynn of Rillage Grange. The heir would come and turn her out ; and there was not a shilling that would come to her. This thought came vaguely to her mind ; but it was there, as it had been all day. Her marriage had been a blunder ; she had given too much for her own way.

It was not that she did not feel grieved for his death ; rather she was stunned by it, and the thoughts that came to her mind were in a tangled medley. She got up after a while and left the little cave, rambling aimlessly to and fro among the rocks which bounded the narrow strip of sand. The sun had dipped below the sea, though she could still see its red light creeping slowly up the cliffs, and fading into the grey twilight. The sea, too, was creeping in, no longer blue, but a pale cold grey. As soon as the sun was gone, the air grew chilly ; and the foam playing on the reef looked

like snow. Suppose her uncle had been dashed against the rocks, as the other boat had been ! It seemed hours since he left her. In another hour or two the tide must fill this little bay, and the tomb-like arch at the back of it, from end to end.

She had climbed round the rocks that hemmed it in, and passed under a little portal worn through them into a second bay beyond, no safer than the one she had left, where Richard was lying helpless. But her keen eyes had discovered a natural pathway up the cliffs, made by the action of the water, steep and perilous, but possible to scale above the highest tide-mark. There she would be safe till help could come ; for surely in the morning she would be able to make herself heard by some passing boat. She clambered up it hurriedly, and looked about her in the gathering dusk. There was not a speck to be seen upon the sea. If her uncle had been coming from Rillage, she must have seen his boat. Some accident had befallen him.

But if she stayed there, in safety, there would be no hope for Richard Herford. She had deserted him, and he was left to perish by the in-coming tide. The only chance for him would be that she should be at her



post, ready to direct her uncle by her shouts, if he should ever come back with succour to the spot where he had left them. It would soon be hidden by the darkness from any possibility of being seen from the sea. A choice lay before her. Safety for herself, and death for him ; or a chance of safety for him, with the alternative of certain death for them both. Must she go back to peril for his sake ?

Life was dear to her, and death was terrible. Superstitious terror alone encircled the thought of death. Yet the very faithfulness within her forbade her to yield to superstitious terror. She could not leave Richard lying unconscious and alone in his living tomb ; to wake up, perhaps, at the cold touch of the sea as it crawled round him. The water was already ankle-deep in the portal lying between her and the spot she must return to, and she shuddered as her feet splashed through it ; but she went on leaving hope and life behind her.

When she reached the niche, now so dark she could scarcely see it, she was yet aware that Richard had stirred while she had been away. She knelt down beside him, and laid her hands on his head, and he


moved again, almost imperceptibly ; but she felt it, and a gleam of comfort came to her. She spoke to him in a clear penetrating voice, which reached his brain—

“ It’s me—Leah,” she said.

“ Don’t leave me,” he whispered.

“ No, never, never !” she cried, bursting into sobs and tears.

She took her seat on the sand again beside him, and buried her face in her hands. She sat still so long, that when at last she lifted up her head, the night was drawing on swiftly, and the stars were twinkling in the sky. In the west there was a tender green light lingering still above the sunset, clear and soft ; and against it stood out the sharp black outlines of the lighthouse, and the rock on which it stood. There was no light shining in the old square belfry ; no light at all. Leah had never seen it dark at night before ; and the sight filled her heart with greater dismay. The sky was dark, but the sea was darker still ; and the cliffs could no longer be distinguished from their shadows, except where their points touched the sky. The long floating seaweed, which had been drying on the rocks an hour before, stretched in black lines upon




the approaching water ; lines which moved to and fro, and filled her with terror lest the sea was bringing to her the lifeless body of her husband. Richard Herford neither spoke nor groaned ; and there was now no sound save the multitudinous voices of the great deep. She could hear its creeping eddies whispering, and rustling, and moaning close beside her, whilst all along the coast the full tide was thundering, wherever it had gained the foot of the cliffs. Even the soft swirl with which it washed gently among the pebbles, lying on the margin of the sand, smote upon her ear. There was no longer any token of familiar human life. She felt as if she was already in a strange and dreary world.

“O God !” she cried, stretching out her hands towards the sea, as though He were beyond it, “send somebody to save us. I was tryin’ to save my husband and Master Dick from drownin’. Oh ! save us from drownin’ !” She had scarcely spoken when a faint light was to be seen in the lighthouse tower. Some one was kindling the lantern there, and the familiar beacon brought comfort to her. It was too far away for any sound of her voice to reach it ; but in some

way her heart grew lighter as she watched it. She did not feel so desolate and forsaken as she had done before; she was still near Rillage and Herford, and God could send them help. But if it did not come soon, if it did not come in a few minutes it might prove too late for Richard Herford. His pulse was growing feebler, and his body more chilled by the night air. She could do nothing for him but watch for help, and share his fate, whatever that might be.

Presently she detected a light dancing up and down among the waves; and she called—a loud piercing cry, that rose above the tumult of the waves. The light changed its course, coming more directly towards her; and in a minute or two she heard a shout. The boat had to approach cautiously through the darkness; but before long she could hear the oars in the water, and by-and-by old Fosse's voice—

“All th' men folk were away at the sheep-washin',” he shouted; “they'd gone up to supper at Farmer Popham's, and there were none but women and children about. I had to go after them myself. But we've got a mattress for Master Dick; and Dr. Vye 'ill be at Rillage afore we can get there.”



CHAPTER XVIII.

CRIPPLED FOR LIFE.

TWO days and nights passed by before Richard Herford regained his full consciousness; though at times he felt a dull sensation of being subject to much keen suffering, and of seeing dark figures, and hearing muffled voices about him, which he vainly tried to bring into more distinct perception to himself. He knew nothing of the lapse of time. There was neither memory nor foresight stirring in his brain. A dark gulf of two lost days, like broken links out of a chain, separated his past life from the future.

When he came to himself he lay for a while perfectly still, making no effort to move. There was profound silence around him, and the room was lighted by a lamp, which he could not see. It seemed only an hour or two, and surely he had fallen asleep somehow during the interval since he had been drinking

with old Mr. Lynn, and laughing over the trick they had played upon Leah, when they had together forced the lock of the old wine-cellar; the key of which she had carried away in her pocket. They had been as merry over it as though they were boys. But Richard's mind was awake, and had awakened from its long stupor with fully its natural vigour. How was it then that he had so clear an impression of inviting old Mr. Lynn to go back with him to Herford, and fetch Leah home? He could recollect distinctly how he and the white-headed stooping old man, had gone down to the beach, and set sail, Mr. Lynn taking the helm. He could actually see him again seated in the stern of the boat, and hear him swearing at the chilly wind. How could it be that he came to be lying in Mr. Lynn's bed? This was his bedroom; he knew it well enough to recognize the place he was in.


He could only answer the question by coming to the conclusion that he had drunk more of the old wine they had found in the cellar than he had intended; and that he had never left Rillage Grange at all. He was vexed with himself; more vexed than usual, for he

knew he might have done Mr. Lynn a mischief ; possibly have led him into a dangerous excess, in Leah's absence. He had been lying quite still until this moment, but now he wished to draw the curtain which screened the head of the bed. But how was this ? His muscles no longer instinctively obeyed his will. He could move his arms and turn his head from side to side on his pillow ; but no other movement seemed possible to him. He made a second effort, and a third, bringing into play all the force of his will, and all the nervous power he possessed ; but he could not stir himself. He lay like a log. There was no longer the usual correspondence between his will, and the heavy framework of bone and flesh which formed its prison.

He could not understand it, or believe it. He was suffering, he thought, from a nightmare, of which the spasms of pain he had vaguely felt were a part. If he waited a short time he would regain his wonted mastery of his own limbs. It was almost laughable to find himself so impotent. He lay quiet, picturing to himself the freshness of the air on the cliffs, and how pleasant a walk homewards would be under the starry

sky, if he could only get out of the house without rousing any one. It was a queer thing to put him into Mr. Lynn's own room. After all it would be best to turn over a new leaf, and give up these dangerous indulgences. He knew what he would do—get the Bishop to find another living for Cunliffe, and persuade Justin to come back to Herford Vicarage. If Justin and Diana were living near to him, by George! he could, and he would, keep himself straight. Richard could use stronger oaths than “By George!” but he rarely did so in the presence of women; and he felt a restraint, something like that of a woman's presence, at this moment.

The nightmare must be over, or he could not reason so clearly. Whoever heard of a man forming schemes of reformation like these, when under the effects of a nightmare? He would get up now. But, though the veins in his temples grew swollen, and drops of perspiration started to his forehead, with the vehement efforts, and the secret dread that was stealing over him, he could not bestir himself and rise from the bed. What was the matter with him? He groaned aloud, as he asked himself this question.



In an instant he heard a footstep cross the room, and Leah looked down on him nervously. She was dressed like a nurse, in a simple cotton gown, and her hair was tucked away under a white cap. Her face was pale, and full of care and sorrow. She looked very unlike the Leah he was used to see.

"Am I ill?" he asked, in sudden terror. She nodded silently: and he could see the tears glistening in her eyes.

"What is the matter?" he inquired. "I feel as heavy as a log; I cannot move myself. What on earth ails me?"

"You've had an accident, and are hurt," answered Leah; "you musn't try to move yourself."

"An accident!" he repeated; "hurt!"

Then with a vivid flash of memory there came back to his brain the terrible moment, when he was struggling with the drunken old man at the helm, whilst the jagged reef of rock was lying across their track, and the breeze was blowing his little boat right upon it. He could hear again the sharp ripping of the planks as the boat struck on a point, and the cracking of the slender mast; and he felt himself struggling in

the sea. That was the last thing he could remember : but he was on the sea then, and it was evening. What was the time now ? and how was it he found himself safe, and in Mr. Lynn's bed ?

" Leah," he said, in an awe-stricken tone, " where is your husband ? "

" Never mind now," she answered sadly.

" He was lost!" he exclaimed ; " he was quite beside himself. I know he was lost."

The tears fell fast from Leah's eyes, and she turned from the bedside to wipe them away, out of Richard's sight. Her husband was in every sense lost ; even the poor drowned body had not been recovered, to be buried among his ancestors.

" Leah ! " Richard called again.

" I'm here," she answered.

" When did it happen ? " he asked.

" That was Tuesday evening," she said, " and we're in the middle of Thursday night. I'm sitting up with you, and Uncle Fosse is in the next room."

" Does Justin know, and Diana ? " he inquired.

" Master Justin sat up with you all last night," she replied, " and Dr. Vye, and a doctor from London.

The London doctor couldn't stay any longer, and he said it was no use him staying."


"Am I much hurt?" asked Richard with intense anxiety. "Tell me the truth, Leah. I must know the truth. What is it makes me feel as if I could not move a limb? I might be made of stone. Is it a very bad accident?"

Leah had come back again, and was looking down on him, with a strange look of deep unutterable pity in her black eyes. Her lips trembled as she spoke, and her voice faltered.

"Master Dick," she said, "wait till Master Justin's here to tell you. He's gone back to London to tell Miss Di; nobody else could tell her how her poor father died. Try to think of God, and go to sleep."

"Think of God?" he repeated. "Do you suppose that would help me to sleep? There's no sleep in me now. Who could go to sleep if they were like me, and could not move a limb? Tell me all about it, Leah."

"I couldn't," she sobbed. "My husband was drowned, and lost altogether; and I can never, never speak kind to him again, nor him to me. I wish I'd



only known ! Wait till Master Justin comes back to-morrow."

"I cannot wait," he cried in an agony : "go, and send old Fosse to me."

Fosse came, and stood beside him as Leah had done, looking down on him with the same expression of deep pity, whilst Richard's eager questioning eyes scanned his face. He did not ask old Fosse to tell him the truth ; the truth would come from his lips, whether he wished to hearken to it or no. He could not run away from it now, as he had done in old times.

"What is it, Fosse ?" he asked.

"Must I tell you all, Master Richard ?" he said.


"Yes !" he answered, though the word was formed by his parched lips, rather than uttered by his voice. He held out his hand, and the old fisherman clasped it between both his own, and fell down on his knees beside the bed.

"Oh ! dear Lord, dear Lord !" he cried, "I know Thou loves us every one, as if we were little young children playin' around Thy footstool. It is Thy footstool, Lord—all this green earth, and fields, and woods ; ay ! and the troubled sea. All about Thy

footstool we're sufferin', and toilin', and lovin', and livin', and dying'; and Thou sees us, and loves us all. The mother watches her little babes playin' at her feet, and wilt Thou not see us, dear Lord? Ay! and if the children fret, and quarrel, and hurt each other, the mother does not drive 'em away wi' anger, from their safe hidin'-place at her feet. And wilt Thou drive Thy sinful children away from Thee? We are far from thinkin' that of Thee, dear Lord.

"And now we lift up our eyes to Thy face, and we call to Thee. We know Thou knows what to do. There's one has died on Thy footstool, drowned in th' sea; and one that's stricken down in his full strength and youth; but spared to live a while longer. Oh! help him to put his trust in Thee! Thou art always good and lovin' and wise; and Thy ways are higher than our ways. Oh! give us strength; give us patience; give us faith in Thee. We seem to feel Thee very near to us, Lord. We have only to wait a little while; and Thou'lt lift us up from Thy feet into Thy bosom."

Old Fosse's voice ceased, but Richard did not open his eyes. He was passing through an agony of dread.



There was a terrible solemnity to him in the old man's prayer, in its simple words and its broken accents.

"Tell me all," he murmured at last ; "what is it?"

"The doctors say you'll never be able to get about again," he answered pitifully ; "it's the back that's hurt. Your head's all right, and your mind clear ; but you'll be a cripple for life. We found you lyin' near the rock the sea had tossed you on, after you had nearly swam ashore. But you're not goin' to die, thank God ! you'll live many a year yet. You'd have died for certain if Leah and me hadn't been sent to save you. Squire Lynn was gone in an instant of time. There's been depths of mercy shown to you, Master Richard."

"To be a cripple for life !" he moaned, turning his face to the wall, and feeling, in the act of movement, how utterly helpless he lay. It seemed to him as if it would have been better to have been killed outright. He was a burden to himself. To have no power over his own limbs ; to be bedridden ; to be nothing but a living log, whilst the world was going on with all its interests, and pleasures, and he taking no part in them, though he was still in the world. Would it

not have been better to have stepped over the boundary at once, and seen what lies on the side of the great mystery of death?

But the choice was not given to him, whether he would die or live. We may long for death, and rejoice exceedingly when we can find the grave; but still life may be given to us, and the sun rise, and the darkness come for us, swinging us from day to night, and from night to day, in spite of all the bitterness of soul, and anguish of body which make the burden of living all but unbearable. Richard Herford lived to feel this. His merry life was over, but it was not to be a short one. Even while he loathed it, he could not but obey the rules by which it could be prolonged. He was compelled to cherish his miserable existence more carefully than he had done whilst it was still full of vigour and the power of enjoyment. Henceforth his chief work in the world would be simply to keep himself alive.

CHAPTER XIX.

VILLAGE TALK.


JUSTIN and Diana had found their happiness weighted with an unexpected burden. They were very happy; happier than they had either of them ever been. The life they led was very different from life at Herford or Rillage Grange. They were brought into contact with many minds, and many interests; and they thoroughly entered into the new intellectual current which was flowing around them. To Diana it was perfectly new. Her life-long seclusion at Rillage gave a charm to all the varied incidents which every day brought to her. The companionship existing between herself and her husband was even more complete than she had anticipated in her brightest day-dreams. He seemed to understand her thoughts and desires without words.

It was Pansy who was tasting the bitterness of




real loneliness; she, who had never known what it was to be alone. Until a few months ago there had not been a thought in her simple heart which she could not have told to her father; but now an absolute dumbness had come over her. She could not tell him how desolate she felt. She had so long believed herself to be first in her father's heart, that it was a profound though wordless grief to her to find Diana there, in the place she had considered her own. It was no wonder, she thought, that he should prefer Diana to her; for Diana was full of life, and animation, and a beautiful happiness, which embellished everything she said and did. Pansy looked on with a sore and sorrowful heart. It was Diana now who was her father's companion; not the little daughter, whose house had been built on sand, and had been swept down in the great storm that had beaten against it.

This was the cloud over Justin's happiness; at first scarcely more than the thin fine mist, which scarcely dims the sunshine, and which is most clearly recognized when it has passed away, and the true brightness shines. He would not own to himself that Pansy's



presence was a restraint, yet when Diana and he were alone together, he felt a freedom that was wanting while her sad young face was beside them. How to bring the smiles back to that face grew a serious problem to both Diana and himself.

This spring was a very different season from the last to all of them. Justin was fully as much occupied with public meetings; for he was a good speaker, apart from any consideration of position or influence, and his services were requested by several committees, in their arrangements for their respective meetings. But he found himself a person of much less social importance, as the secretary of a small charity, than he had been as the possible candidate for parliamentary membership. As to Pansy, the season was a miserable counterfeit of the last. She heard of the same things, read of them in the newspapers, was near enough to catch the echo of them, and that was all her share. No one mentioned the Fortescues in her hearing—those summer friends of hers, who had won her girlish heart, and tossed it away as a worthless bauble. It was the bitterness of this which crushed Pansy's spirit. She envied Jenny Cunliffe, who had always



envied her. Why had not her father been content to remain the humble vicar of Herford, when she would have grown up as his daughter unnoticed and uncourted?

Sometimes Diana fancied she heard, in the still hours of the night, moans and sobs reaching her through the thin walls of their cottage. But when she stole into Pansy's room with her softest footstep, she would find her sleeping apparently, with the quiet, regular breathing of girlhood. Pansy smothered her crying, half ashamed and half frightened. What could she tell Diana? How could she find words to express the morbid sorrows that were poisoning the sources of life? Diana would reason with her, and talk to her of submitting to God, of trusting to His love. As yet, Pansy could do neither.

It was just such an evening in May, as the one when Pansy and Justin had driven homewards the year before through the cool and quiet lanes lying between Lowborough and Herford. All the village was astir. By this time every person in it knew that the great London doctor, as well as Dr. Vye, had pronounced solemnly that there was no hope of

Master Richard ever getting about again. The place had been in a tumult of agitation, almost as great as if every household shared personally in the calamity that had happened. This evening they were scattered in groups of three and four all along the valley, upon the road which Richard had tramped down, footsore and weary, but in vigorous health and strength, only a year ago. Leah and his mother were watching and weeping beside him now at Rillage Grange. It was known that Justin was coming back with his wife and Miss Pansy, and all the villagers had turned out to catch a glance at them, though it was felt to be inopportune to give them any other welcome. All the Lynns who were in England were also coming, to stay at Herford Court while their affairs were settled, for Richard could neither be moved from Rillage Grange, nor bear the noise of a number of visitors there.

"Please God," said old Fosse, "we shall have Master Justin and Miss Pansy back among us for good. Herford's never been itself with them away."

"But Master Dick's the master still," objected

one of his hearers; "Master Justin 'ud be nought but a bailiff."

"Master or bailiff," answered old Fosse, "Herford 'ud be a different place wi' Master Justin in it."

"Th' old squire has well nigh ruined Rillage," said Dan Popham, from the home farm at Rillage; "they say Captain Lynn 'll find himself up to the neck in mortgages. He'd no share in his mother's fortune, bein' his father's heir, and he can't afford to live in the place now it's come to him. It's many a year since any one of us has clapped eyes on any o' th' Lynns, except Miss Di. What 'll they do with th' Grange, thinks-ta."

"It'll be many a long week ere master Dick can be moved, if all's true," said another.

"What 'ill Leah Dart do now?" asked a third; "she's not been a fine lady for long. Folks say there won't be a brass farthin' for her, when all's over—not a farthin'. She'll be sorry she turned up her nose at thee, Dan Popham."


"I'd marry Leah Dart any day she'd have me," said Dan; "she's a brave lass."

“Leah’s made up her mind to stay wi’ Master Dick, as long as he needs her,” answered old Fosse. “She’s saved his life, and now she’ll take care of it, and she’s a rare good nurse. Master Dick ’ill have every comfort nursin’ can give him. And Leah has repented herself sore for all her folly and sin, and, please God! she’ll make a good woman yet.”

“If Master Justin comes back for good,” said the woman who had spoken of Leah, “which ’ill be mistress at Herford Court, the old madam, or the new one?”

That was a question none of them could answer. It was well known that Mrs. Herford set great store on her position as mistress of Herford, and had frequently declared that no new mistress could or should depose her.

“Mrs. Cunliffe ’ill miss gettin’ her own way this time,” remarked the same woman, who was notorious as a gossip in Herford. “There’s no chance of Master Dick ever gettin’ married now, so Miss Jennie is safe. I thought as all Mrs. Cunliffe’s eggs ’ud never get hatched; she’ll have to put up wi’ a few addled ones.”



There was a general titter, understood by all but old Fosse himself, who was the only person in Herford that did not know the history of Mrs. Cunliffe's chickens.

"Hush! hush! hush!" he said, in a kindly tone. "we must all put up wi' addled eggs. Let's take care we don't hatch cockatrice eggs. There's a many sins have got a smooth white shell outside 'em, but when they're hatched they sting. I don't know what eggs Mrs. Cunliffe has to do with, but poor Leah has hatched hers, and a pretty brood of sorrows are come of it. And we're all the same, all the same; silly creatures that don't know what they're wishin' for."

"Here they come," shouted Dan Popham.

Two carriages were coming down the valley, and the villagers stood aside under the hedgerows, the men taking off their caps, and the women curtsying in silence as they passed. There was a gravity and a sadness about this return, that struck painfully upon Pansy, who was looking eagerly from side to side at the old familiar faces. When the carriages were out of sight the people dispersed slowly to their own homes.

“ Didst-ta see Miss Pansy?” they asked one another.
“ She looks like as if she was struck for death. It was
like a funeral, their comin’ back.”

“ God forbid ! ” said Mrs. Fosse, and the other
mothers in the village.

CHAPTER XX.

WILLING SERVICE.

THE Lynn family had met under somewhat strange circumstances. Their father's death had brought them together, yet there were no funeral rites to be attended. It would have been a relief to go through the ordinary ceremonies which follow death. For a day or two, until some idea had been gained as to the state of old Mr. Lynn's affairs, the sons passed away their time in rambling over the neglected estate, and the badly-cultivated fields of the home-farm, whilst Diana and one of her elder sisters, the only daughters living in England, were occupied in providing their mourning dresses. Diana alone mourned over her father, to whom she had given the best of her life, and for whom she had hoped against hope. The catastrophe she had always dreaded, and which she had averted during many years by a complete self-sacrifice, had overtaken him as

soon as she had left him to other guardianship. Ought she, then, to have remained with him ?

Her father's widow was an encumbrance and embarrassment. There was, of course, no provision for her, and none of Diana's brothers and sisters were willing to do anything for Leah, who kept herself out of sight as much as she could, with an instinctive feeling that they all blamed her for the sudden death of their father. When Diana saw her first, she was startled at the paleness of her face, and the traces of long continuous weeping about her eyes. Justin had sent Leah across to Herford Court to get over the inevitable meeting with his wife, which had been put off from day to day, and she fell down on her knees before Diana.

" Oh, I shall never forgive myself for leavin' him ! " cried Leah ; " but I thought Master Dick was safe away, and there'd be nobody to come and tempt him. I did my best to be a good wife to him, only it were hard, Miss Di, never to see my own mother, and her frettin', and sendin' me scornful messages, as if I felt myself too grand to go and see her. Can you ever forgive me, Miss Di ? " .

" I forgive you, if there is anything for me to for-

give," answered Diana, and, moved by a sudden impulse of compassion and grief, she stooped and kissed Leah's pale face, which flushed with momentary pleasure. "Get up, Leah," she added, "and sit down here beside me. We have a good deal to talk about. My brother, Captain Lynn, and I have been thinking what can be done for you."

"Don't do nothin' for me," she said, earnestly; "it's my fault as you are not livin' still with your father, and takin' care of him. I deserve to be punished; and Uncle Fosse and me, we thought you might let me be servant."

"No, no," interrupted Diana, "we must not let our father's widow go into service."

"Listen only a minute," urged Leah, "servant to Master Dick; his nurse, you know. I was afraid you wouldn't, perhaps, let me be, because I know I'm Leah Lynn now—old Squire Lynn's wife. But I'd never call myself by his name, and I'd never, never speak as if I'd belonged to you, if you'd only give your consent to me bein' servant to Master Dick. He'll want somebody faithful now that he'll never set his foot to the floor again; and I'd rather wait on him than be the finest

lady in the land. It will be a hard thing to have old Mrs. Herford for a mistress, after I've been on a level with her, and been her visitor, and I know she'll make it as bad as bad can be; but I'll put up with it, I will indeed, Miss Di. Master Justin, he'd be satisfied if his poor brother was well done by, as long as I was about him."

"I'm sure he would be, Leah," said Diana.

"He groans and mourns all day long, and all night too," continued Leah, with tears in her eyes, "it almost breaks my heart to hear him. 'Oh, God! oh, God!' he cries, hundreds and hundreds of times. And I'm no scholar, like you; and I'm not in favour wi' God, like Uncle Fosse. He isn't any scholar, but he speaks as if God told him the very words he ought to say. I never know what to say to Master Dick, and I can do nothin' to comfort him, only smoothin' his pillow, and fetchin' him somethin' to eat or drink. If you'd come and see him! He thinks all the world o' you."

"I'll come gladly," replied Diana.

"I know I'm nothin' better than a common servant-girl," said Leah, humbly, "and he only used to make

game o' me, so it 'ud be no use me sayin' anythin', even if I knew how. But you're a lady, and he thinks all the world o' you."

It cost Leah a pang to own this in so many words. Though she had risked her life for Richard Herford, and was willing to devote it to his service, he thought nothing of her, whilst he thought all the world of Diana, who had never given to him a moment's care. She could not explain it to herself. Richard Herford had never been like Justin, who seemed to belong altogether to another sphere than hers. Richard had always chosen to associate with people like himself. Then how was it that he could think so much of Diana, and find merely a subject of ridicule in her own devotion and love to him?

"And oh! Miss Di," she continued, "his mother can't comfort him, no more than me. She sits and cries, and wails by his bedside, and never says a word to cheer him up. 'We shall have to live all the rest of our days in this hole,' she says, 'there's no more company for us, and no pleasure in life. I'm a miserable woman,' she says. Sometimes Master Dick pretends to be asleep, when he hears her come in. 'Leah,' he

said, last night, 'what have I done to bring my father's curses on me? Justin says he took them off before he died, but they've overtaken me all the same. I made him miserable, and now I'm miserable. Even my mother looks on me as a burden.' 'You're no burden to me, Master Dick,' I said; 'I love to wait on you.' But it was no good, he only groaned deeper than ever; and I heard him callin', 'Oh, God! oh, God!' like a child that's lost its way, and is callin' for its mother."

Leah hid her face in her hands, weeping bitterly, and Diana wept too. It was pitiful to them both to think of Richard Herford suddenly struck down in his full vigour, but Diana's grief and pity were nothing to Leah's.

"What I want to ask," resumed Leah, "is to be only his nurse, Leah Dart, just as if I'd never called myself anythin' else. I know you and Captain Lynn, and the rest, have a right to settle what I ought to do, because I was your father's wife, but folks will forget all that by-and-by. It was a silly blunder o' mine, and I'm rightly punished for it. I'm young and strong, and I might take care o' Master Dick as long as he lives. Oh, my dear Miss Di, he'll need somebody very

true and patient, to take care of him. The doctors say by-and-by, maybe not for some years yet, but the mischief 'ill creep up to his head, and he'll be quite silly, like a poor idiot. He'll need somebody to love him very faithful then ; and there's nobody in the world but me. Other folks might be cruel to him ; and it breaks my heart already to think he might be badly dealt by. Perhaps it's the work God has set for me ; I'd like to think it was, it 'd be so kind of Him. If I could only fancy God was sayin', 'Leah, you take care of this poor Master Dick for Me,' I could keep on for hundreds o' years. That 'ud give me all the help I want."

"Leah," said Diana, taking her large red hand between her own, "I believe God has set you this work to do. It will be a great sacrifice for you, my poor girl ; but I believe you can do it. Yes ; you shall take care of him if you will."

"You'll let me be Master Dick's servant !" exclaimed Leah.

"With all my heart ; it's a noble thing to do," answered Diana. "Did you never hear what Jesus said, 'Whosoever is chief among you let him be your servant ; even as the Son of Man came not to be

ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many?' You are choosing wisely now, Leah."

"I don't know much about Him," she said, with kindling eyes, "but it's somethin' like what Uncle Fosse says. Do you mean that Jesus Christ was like a servant, a real servant, doin' real work that was beneath him? Not makin' believe to work like grand folks do. I never thought of that before. I wish I had, before I began to wish to be a lady. I'll think about that when I grow tired and low. And I'll keep myself under to Mrs. Herford, however aggravatin' she is. If I could only be a right good woman at last, I'd put up with anythin'. Jesus Christ doin' real work that was beneath him! Oh, Miss Di, what a foolish woman I have been!"

Leah went back to Rillage Grange with a lightened heart. She knew very well that a dreary life lay before her; and that the service she had entered upon would be a hard one. Not for her would there be any of the common joys and sorrows of her own class; no small, quiet home of her own; neither husband nor child. She had forfeited all these; and in their place was

allotted to her a life of constant care and weariness ; sleepless nights and anxious days. Yet she felt glad, she hardly knew why. Her path by the cliffs led her past the almost hidden cove where she had faced death, while choosing to remain faithful to Richard Herford.

With slow and cautious steps she felt her way to the summit of the precipice, and, lying down, stretched her head over the edge to catch a glimpse of the strip of sand far below her. The waves were running in upon it, curling and rippling in the sunshine, as if playing with one another ; but none the less stealthily creeping over it, and cutting off all means of escape from it. If she had forsaken her charge, and left Richard Herford there in his unconsciousness, death would have been certain. Thank God ! she had kept true.

But as Leah went on her way, slowly and thoughtfully, it seemed to her that the doom stealthily creeping onwards upon Richard Herford was like the treacherous tide she had been gazing on from the perilous standpoint. It might come slowly, but there was no escape from it. No love or pity could save him. It would be her lot to watch its inroads and encroachments ; to sit

by, and see him sinking into helpless imbecility. For the hours she had waited under the cliffs for deliverance, there would be years to wait for the only deliverance that could come to release Richard Herford. Could she remain all those years beside him?

“God keep me true!” cried Leah in her inmost heart.

CHAPTER XXI.

A HIRED SERVANT.

IT was several weeks before Diana could gather courage and strength sufficient to revisit her old home. The shock of her father's death had been too great and too sudden for her to rally quickly from the blow. The dreary circumstances attending it preyed upon her spirits; and Justin, who was compelled by the duties of his secretaryship to leave Herford for days together, would not listen to any project of her visiting Rillage Grange, and his brother Richard, until she had in a measure recovered her natural balance.

Justin was fully awake to the difficulties of his own and his brother's position with regard to each other, and to the estate. There was no hope of even a partial recovery for Richard from the fatal injury to the spine, which reduced him to the state of a helpless and bed-ridden cripple. How many years he might linger on

in this condition would be due to the manner in which he bore his terrible doom, and to the faithfulness of his nurse and attendants. Yet he was the owner of Herford, and had a clear right to dispose of it as he chose. No doubt, at present, he fully intended to bequeath it to Justin; but there was nothing to prevent him, in the future, from leaving it to any stranger who might seek to gain an undue influence over his weakened brain. Richard must fall more and more under the impulses of mere caprice and whim; and as his mind grew feebler his passions would grow stronger. There must be to the end an utter uncertainty of succeeding to his possessions.

Yet the estate needed a master. Already, during the twelve months since Justin had given it up, affairs had fallen into some disorder. His quick eye discerned it, as he rode over the farm attached to Herford Court; and inquired into the progress of the trade he had started by the coasting craft, which had succeeded so well under his own direction. There had not been time for any serious neglect or falling off; but there was the beginning of it to be detected everywhere. It annoyed Justin, as it annoys every man whose heart is


in his work, to see that on which he has bestowed much labour and thought falling into decay and ruin. Now that Richard was absolutely disabled, though he could not ruin himself and his estate by reckless extravagances, neither could he look after his own affairs at all. Henceforth he must see only through the eyes of another man, issue his orders through another man's mouth, and leave everything in another man's hands.

Justin's love for Herford was too deeply rooted ever to be altogether eradicated. He had entered heartily into his new work, and enjoyed it with the vigour and healthy enjoyment of a man who feels that he is living a conscientious and useful life. But in Herford, he felt that the prosperity and peace of the whole place was in a great measure due to himself, and dependent upon him. His friendship for many of the homely fishermen was as true a friendship as can exist between man and man. It had been very pleasant to him to dwell among them, as he had done, in an almost patriarchal fashion; their head and leader; the chieftain whom they were all willing to follow loyally. There were many life-long ties uniting them to him, and him to them. It had been a grievous thing to him to leave

them to Richard ; it was hardly less grievous to think of them being left to the direction of a hireling.


Slowly the project formed itself in his mind to come back to Herford, as Richard's bailiff. This meant to be a servant where he had been master ; a servant to an imperious and capricious employer. He would not be Herford of Herford. Richard had resented his change of name, and refused to call him by the family surname ; and though he had now a legal right to the name of Herford it was possible that Richard would persist in calling him by his old surname. Continual vexations and mortifications would beset him. There would be nothing to gain for himself ; but very much for Richard, for Herford, and for the people who had been his care during so many years.

His post in London could be filled up immediately by scores of men as well qualified for its duties as himself. But who else could fill this post as he could ? His love for Herford and his regard for its interests had pleaded strongly on the wrong side, in those sharp and bitter conflicts which had preceded his resignation of the estate to his half-brother. All the weight these considerations had had then, ought to influence him



now. If he could serve God and man better at Herford than elsewhere, it was his duty to trample under foot any mere dread of encountering vexations and mortifications. Was he not called upon to "consider Him who endured such contradictions of sinners against Himself," and not to be weary and faint in his mind? "It is enough for the disciple that he be as his master, and the servant as his lord."

There was the Rillage estate too ; the lands belonging to Diana's brother, lying side by side with the Herford estate. Captain Lynn, the heir, could not live upon it, and he was already seeking an agent to take it into his hands. Justin had often revolved schemes in his mind for developing the natural resources of his neighbour's lands, and from time to time had tried to arouse old Squire Lynn to some energy. It would not be too much to take charge of both Herford and Rillage. There would be no magisterial duties to discharge ; and the claims of society upon him would be few when he was known to be no longer the owner but the bailiff of Herford. Why should he not be his brother's bailiff ? Every day that he was at Herford Court he crossed the cliffs to Rillage Grange, to spend some time with him,



and strengthen and comfort him under the great calamity that had overwhelmed him. There was a pathetic helplessness about Richard that touched the deepest chord of brotherhood in Justin's nature. He thought of his mother, too, querulous and unhappy, for whom he still cherished half-pitiful, half-chivalrous affection. How was he to leave these two utterly dependent, utterly miserable beings to the care of mere hirelings?

Here, more than anywhere else, he could follow closely the footsteps of his Lord. There was no reputation to be gained, neither dignity nor glory. Ambition must fade away out of his path. If he was to save others he could not save himself.

He had fully, though gradually, made up his mind what he would do, before Diana found courage enough to venture upon going to see Richard in her old home. Her brother, Captain Lynn, the poor heir of the impoverished estate, was with her, as well as Justin, and the three stood looking down upon Rillage Grange from the steep brow of the hill immediately above it. It lay directly below them in the bright sunshine. The decaying roof was picturesque with its tufts of yellow house-

leek and stonecrop growing luxuriantly upon it, and the tangled garden looked green and wild. But none the less the light shone pitilessly on ruin and decay. Diana gazed down upon it with bitter sorrow. It had never seemed so dreary and desolate before, and the sight of it after a few months of absence struck her with sudden force. Yet it was her home, and it was dear to her. Her brother, who stood beside her, was looking down on his inheritance with a gloomy and embittered expression.

"It was a pretty place once, and now it's hardly worth an old song," said Captain Lynn : "yet after all it's mine. The poor old place has belonged to us for centuries almost, and I should not like to lose it. What am I to do with it, Herford ? "

"It will be years before you can come to it," answered Justin, "you must nurse your estate for your son. Put it into tolerable repair, and let it on a long lease, that will make it worth while for your tenants to spend money on it."

"Tenants ! where shall I find a tenant ? " asked Captain Lynn ; "a tumble-down dilapidated old place ! And who would bury themselves alive here ? "

"I can offer you a tenant as soon as Richard can be taken home," answered Justin. "Would you take Diana and me?"

"Diana and you!" Captain Lynn repeated.

"Yes," said Justin, "we have been talking over matters, and Diana and I cannot see anything better to be done than for me to become bailiff for both your estate and Richard's. You are looking out for an agent, but you really need a farm-bailiff; and I am better qualified than any one else. The lands on both of them are as well known to me as Diana's face is, and I know how to make the best of them. If you accept my offer we will settle down here as soon as Richard returns to Herford. You can make yourself happy here, Diana?"

"Anywhere with you," she answered, looking up to him through her tears.

"But, good heavens!" exclaimed Captain Lynn, "you a bailiff, Herford!"

"I must be that or a secretary," said Justin, smiling. "I can be my own master no longer, with my living to get. I can be anything—anywhere—God with me."

"It would be first-rate for me," resumed Captain

Lynn, after a short silence, "and for Dick Herford. We shall be too selfish to say 'No' to it. Diana would be at home again, too, and of course no one would look upon you as a mere bailiff, you know. The estate is certain to come to you sooner or later; and it will be all the better for you in the long run. Dick Herford would be a rascally scoundrel if he left it away from you. You always had a long head, Justin."

A long head! Justin winced a little at these words. But he had not renounced his ambition with any idea that the world would understand and applaud the sacrifice. What did it matter if the whole world thought he was scheming? God knew he would give all he had to set Richard on his feet again, and see him once more at the head of his own house. Diana knew why he was acting as he had purposed; and surely his brother would know!

They went down into the valley and entered the dreary house. Not a sound was to be heard in any of its rooms, for profound stillness was necessary for Richard Herford. The farm-yard, that lay a field or two away, had been cleared, that no sharp or sudden noise should break the silence. The door was opened

and closed again by Justin with great caution, and their footsteps fell softly on the matted floor of the passages. They waited for a few minutes in Diana's sitting-room for Mrs. Herford to come to see them. She entered silently and dejectedly, and greeted them with tears.

"It's like a tomb," she said, "always just like this. We might as well be buried alive. Poor dear Mrs. Cunliffe came to see me yesterday, and Dick declared he could hear her voice through three walls and up a flight of stairs. He sent Leah to tell me I must not ask her to stay to dinner; after that long walk too! She was as much disappointed as I was, but what could we do? She says she can spare Jenny to live with me as long as I'm here, and Mr. Cunliffe doesn't object to her coming now; but Richard says no. 'It's not fit for a young girl,' he says; 'it's too gloomy.' Then how can it be fit for me?"

No one appeared able to answer this question, and a short silence followed, broken by Mrs. Herford's sighs.

"Can he see no one?" asked Diana.

"Oh yes! my brother-in-law Watson is with him


now," said Mrs. Herford peevishly, "and he's been to see him a good deal lately—on business, he says; though he never gives me a hint of what it may be. His will, I fancy; and he might ask my opinion, I'm sure. If his poor father had consulted me, we should not have had all these troubles. And old Fosse has been with him. Old Fosse's voice is ten times louder than Mrs. Cunliffe's. He doesn't complain of Leah's voice either. It's only one of his whims, and I'm to be made the slave of them."

"Master Dick's ready to see Miss Di and Master Justin," said Leah, opening the door, and entering the room a step or two, in her plain black dress and white cap. She curtsied deeply to Captain Lynn, and stood at the door to close it after Justin and Diana, as a servant would do. There was nothing in her manner to denote that she was the mistress of the house or the widow of its late owner. Leah was carrying out her resolve to be nothing more than Richard Herford's servant.

CHAPTER XXII.

RIGHT AT LAST.

TIME seemed to be standing still for Richard Herford ; he measured it no longer by days, and weeks, and months. It might have been years already since he awoke to consciousness to find himself a prisoner within the four walls of the room, which he was powerless to quit. He could not even reach the window to catch a moment's glimpse of the sky and cliffs. To all about him the calamity that had befallen him was yet new and recent ; to himself it felt centuries old. It had happened so long since that all his former life had withdrawn into a past, spent and ended ages ago. Childhood, and boyhood, and manhood were all blended into one distant phase of beauty and gladness ; for he was a man no longer, he said to himself in bitterness. There was no perspective in his past life. The great



gulf which lay between it and the present set it so far apart from him that all its long line of years were concentrated into a single point. He had lived; he was living no longer.


"How long is it, Leah, how long is it?" he asked frequently; and when she told him it was yet only so many days or weeks since he had set his sails to the wind and felt the salt spray on his face, he listened in mute anguish. Was it not rather centuries? thousands of years? There were no terms broad enough to express the endlessness of the period which separated him from the common months and years of common life. Henceforth there would be no change of seasons for him; nothing but the change from day to night; and even that with no sight of the sun by day, or of the moon and stars by night.

"Justin," he said, one morning, "would to God I'd been drowned with old Lynn! It would have been better for us both; and you'd have been Herford of Herford again."

Herford of Herford! He could not be that himself; he was no man, but a mere log, and cumberer of the ground. What was Herford to him? He would never

more ride over his fields, or hoist his sails, or welcome his old comrades to his open house. There was nothing left to him but to lie as he was, with no gleam of pleasure, except those that came to him through the ministry of Justin, and Diana, and Pansy. Diana had not yet been to see him, but Pansy had insisted upon staying near him, ready to come to his side and talk as cheerily as she knew how, or sing to him quiet, homely country songs in her sweet low voice. Pansy was something lovely and delicate to look at, and her gentle movements soothed him. Justin's daily visits, when he was at Herford Court, were a break in the gloomy monotony of the days. How was he to tide over the days, if these almost endless spells of light could be called days, when they were gone back to London?

If Justin were settled at Herford again, he would make sure of the friendship and constant neighbourhood of his brother. His mother and he could stay at Rillage Grange; for what did it matter to him in what dull chamber his log of a body might lie? Leah would live with them; for she had promised never to leave him. With Justin and Diana little more than two miles away, he could reckon on their frequent companionship;



and Pansy, little Heartsease, as he called her, might be with him almost constantly. How could he make sure of having them all about him?


Justin could not live at Herford without a sufficient income to keep it up; and if he had the income of the estate, it would be better for him to have the estate itself, with all the power and influence it carried with it. Richard cared for money only so far as it procured him personal enjoyment. There had always been a vein of reckless liberality in his temperament, which had hitherto taken the form of lavish expenditure, by no means incompatible with selfish disregard to the claims of others. As long as he could fritter away his means upon pleasure, he had found it impossible to spare any for other purposes. But his pleasures were ended for ever; and as he could no longer use his money himself, he was willing to hand it over to others. He had no love of mere accumulation.

His Uncle Watson, whom he consulted, assured him that he could not execute a will, making Justin his heir, which he would not have power himself to revoke, as long as he was of sound mind in the eye of the law. Richard knew that he dare not trust himself, and his

capricious humour ; and he was equally sure that Justin could not trust him. In any hour of pique and resentment, he might disinherit his brother, and give over his old family estate to a stranger. Justin had already made the name of Herford of Herford better known and more honoured in the county than it had ever been ; and it was in Richard's power to reinstate him. If Justin were made absolute master again, it would set him free to act as he chose, which would be impossible if he were merely his brother's heir, waiting for his death.

Richard turned the scheme over in his own mind, and talked of it to Leah, and old Fosse, cautiously at first, but with increasing pleasure every time he spoke of it. He would retain a good income for himself ; but the bulk of the property should be made over to Justin again. Mr. Watson approved of the plan heartily. He had always been proud of his nephew Justin, though Dick had been his favourite ; and to see the former Herford of Herford once more, and immediately, gratified his pride. Each one of his three counsellors encouraged Richard in his design.

Mr. Watson and he were discussing the prelimi-



nary arrangements when Richard was told that Diana had at last re-visited her old home in order to see him. But though Justin and Pansy had described his condition to her, Diana was taken by surprise when she saw the change that had passed over him. She was deeply agitated herself, for he was occupying her father's bedroom, and was lying on his bed, utterly helpless, save for the feeble movement of the hand stretched out to her as she approached him. His face was pale and worn, but it was more like Justin's than it had been before; and his eyes looked up earnestly to hers, with a pathetic mournfulness of appeal in them. Diana bent over him, and laid her lips gently upon his forehead, whilst her hand returned the faint pressure of his nerveless fingers.

"Thank you, Diana; God bless you!" he exclaimed. He had known her and almost worshipped her from his boyhood, and the tears started into his eyes as he looked up into her pitying face.

"I would do anything for you," she said eagerly. "Justin and I will do anything in the world. You are our brother. There is nothing we are not ready to give up to comfort and help you."

"I am sure of it," he answered.

"Yes," she continued, stroking back the heavy hair from his hot forehead with her cool caressing fingers, "I shall often be with you now. You shall not be left alone. Justin and I have agreed that he shall be your steward and bailiff, to carry out your orders and attend to your interests; and as much as I can, I will be your nurse. Justin is fit to be a king," said Diana, glancing round proudly at her husband, "but he will take the place of a servant to you, to take care of you, and your estate, and your people. You will know now that he is a good man; that he did not take your place to wrong you. As soon as you came back, he gave up all to you of his own free will. My husband has always been a good true man."

"Yes, I know it," said Richard with a faint smile.

"Diana is in a hurry to tell you our plans," said Justin; "but you can think it over, Dick. Herford and Rillage will want somebody to take care of them, and they are no more than I can manage well. Between you, you and Captain Lynn can pay me a fair salary, and Diana and I will live here after you are gone home again. I should be close to you, and should see you

almost every day ; you would be sure of having Diana and Pansy often. I think you will find it very much to your interest, when you come to look at it quietly."

"It's a good plan," interposed Mr. Watson abruptly and eagerly, lest Justin's proposal should turn Richard from his purpose, "but Dick's plan is ten times better. Sit down, my dear," he said, placing a chair for Diana, "sit down, and let Richard tell you what he has proposed to do."

A short silence fell upon them. Diana felt a little chill of disappointment, as if Justin's magnanimous sacrifice of his own interests was being undervalued, and her clear dark eyes were fixed upon Richard's face inquiringly. He could not keep silence under their grave scrutiny.

"How long will it be before I could be taken home?" he asked in the languid tones of pain.

"Months, perhaps," answered Justin.

"Months?" said Richard mournfully. "No, never, till I am carried out dead. I may as well live here as anywhere else, if you call this living. Why should I undergo the agony of being moved? I'm not so fond of Herford that I want to die where my poor old father

died. I should think of his curses more at Herford than here. No ; leave me in peace here ; I'll never go back to Herford Court."

"Who will live there, then ?" asked Justin.

"You and Diana and your children," replied Richard. "I'm not a dog in the manger, to keep what I can never enjoy. God knows, you are best fitted to be Herford of Herford, and I'm going to give it up to you again."

"No, no !" interrupted Justin.

"Hold your tongue, Justin !" cried Mr. Watson ; "Dick's in the right. You're not to be the only one to do a noble thing. Go on, Dick, my boy. It's a grand thing to do ; a noble first-rate thing. You'll think of it many a time after it's done, and be glad and proud that you did it."

This little draught of praise acted as a stimulant to Richard's resolution. He met Diana's earnest gaze with a smile, and spoke again with a stronger voice.

"I shall be glad to think of you both living at Herford Court," he said ; "and, Justin, I'm about to make over almost all to you. They say—Leah told me, and if it's not true you can say so—that the longer

I live the weaker my brain will grow. It's an awful thing to think of. There will come a time when I might be foolish enough to do a rascally thing—such as leaving my lands away from you. Let me do a grand thing now, while I can. Perhaps God will let it be some atonement. It will be better for my soul, than if I kept all in my own hands."

"I cannot say anything now," answered Justin, "but it is a grand thing for you to do. Dick, my boy, I'd give worlds to have you my little brother again; and see you grow up master of Herford. I would do more than I did to help you to be good and true. Would to God we could recall the past!"

"Old Fosse is eager for it," continued Richard, "and Uncle Watson approves of it. What can I do with lands and money? Let me have you and Diana and Pansy always near me; it is the only comfort I can have now. You shall call your eldest son Richard; and there will be a better Dick Herford than I could ever have been. You cannot say anything but yes to it, Justin."

But Justin was in no haste to bring the question to a conclusion. He insisted upon Richard taking three

months longer to consider his purpose, and to take the highest opinion as to the possibility of his future recovery. He had no desire to snatch hastily again the prize for which he had once forfeited his integrity.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A GREY DAY.

THERE was universal joy in Herford when it was announced that Justin was coming back to the Court as its actual owner. The circumstances of his reinstatement did not admit of any outward demonstrations of rejoicings; but the congratulations offered to him were fervent and deep. Old Fosse was triumphant in his thanksgivings. Philip Cunliffe felt as profound a joy as any one in welcoming back his friend; and Mrs. Cunliffe expressed her rapture of delight, in terms as enthusiastic as if she had not tasted a moment's happiness since she had lost sight of Justin and Pansy. It was autumn before Justin would finally accept the settlement Richard was prepared to make, and before he found himself once more Herford of Herford. But already he had resumed his old life,


as if he had never quitted it. The former routine, full of pleasant and congenial occupation to him, had closed round him, and filled up his days and weeks. There was only one change in his home ; Diana was in the place of his mother, at the head of his house. Had he, then, paid the full penalty for his old transgression ? All the world was ready to forget it, and blot it out of remembrance, now he was back again in his old sphere. In a little while it would cease to note that Richard had been Herford of Herford for the space of one short year. Had the dead past buried its dead ?

That which hurts us most in life is, that there is no retracing of our steps, no calling back of the fugitive hours ; no possibility of undoing that which is once done. Every sin has an immortal existence. Forgiven it may be, and forgotten for a while. But it can never be with us as it would have been had that sin never been born. It meets us again and again through life ; whispers to us in quiet moments ; looks across the years to us with its pale sad face, and in unexpected ways reminds us that it is ours ; it belongs to us. It is the lie our own lips spoke ; the wrong our

own hearts were guilty of. Eternity itself, heaven itself, cannot set straight that crooked line.

Sometimes still, when Justin met his friend Philip Cunliffe, tranquilly and contentedly trudging on foot, in any weather, to some distant corner in his parish, for no other purpose than to visit some sick old woman or look after a truant child, it filled his mind with thoughts as to how it would have been with himself had he remained the vicar of Herford, and continued to dwell in the little vicarage, with Pansy growing up beside him. If he had explained the mistake that had been made in burning his stepfather's will, Richard would have come home, and entered at once upon his inheritance; and he would have been nothing else, if he remained in Herford, than its poor vicar. He was the squire now, rightfully and securely. Had he given too high a price for his possessions?

The payment was not to be remitted, because he had at last retraced his steps into the narrow pathway of integrity. There was a sleeping dread in the deepest recesses of his heart, that he had still the heaviest portion of his penalty to bear. He talked, and looked, and acted as a man free from anxiety; yet he was



conscious of a lurking anxiety, which he dared not face. He was more fully occupied than ever; but in the midst of all his occupations, he kept an almost stealthy watch over Pansy, marking every change in her face, and listening to every word she spoke.

Justin's love for his daughter was something apart from all other love. She had been born whilst he was still in his earliest manhood; when he had no one else to love, after his first hasty, boyish marriage had proved a mistake and blunder. Her mother's death had thrown the child in utter dependence upon his care; and every stage of Pansy's life stood fresh and clear in his memory. He could recall a hundred images of her to his mind. When his eyes rested upon her changed face, he recollected the rosy merry girl, who had filled the old rooms of the Court with innocent fun and frolic; the questioning little child, with the shrewd curiosity of childhood, running at his side through the village street; the small, helpless baby lying in his arms, or sleeping in her cradle on his study hearth. She represented every phase of childhood and girlhood to him; and his love for her was woven through and through the tissue of his life.

It was quite evident that Pansy was not regaining her former bloom and strength in her native air. She spent a large portion of her time at Rillage Grange, as if she chose the stillness and the gloom there, in preference to her old home under its changed aspects. Before long the walk over the cliffs proved too rough and fatiguing for her; and Justin was obliged to drive her round by the road, and leave her with his mother when the weather was unsettled. He began to miss her from his home often enough to feel what a blank would be there, if she were gone never to return. It was plain that it was no longer home-sickness that preyed upon her.

Mrs. Cunliffe had at last found a suitable situation for Jenny, as governess in Sir Robert Fortescue's family; and she was never weary of retailing any little piece of news which came to her in Jenny's letters. Pansy, who had no other chance of hearing the Fortescues mentioned, sometimes listened with eager intentness, and sometimes fled away to the refuge of her old room, empty of its poor and trifling treasures, which had been swept away by her grandmother, as soon as she and Justin had quitted Herford Court.

“Jenny tells me quite a secret,” said Mrs. Cunliffe, one morning to Diana and Pansy; “it is a secret at present, but of course it will not be so very long; so I shall betray no confidence by mentioning it to you. Mr. Robert Fortescue is your cousin-german, I believe; your first cousin’s son? If I am wrong you must kindly set me right, dear Mrs. Herford.”

“You are not wrong,” answered Diana coldly; “but I have never seen much of them.”

“Still you are the same family,” continued Mrs. Cunliffe, “and they speak most kindly of you. Lady Fortescue asked Jenny how dear Pansy was the other day; and spoke of having seen her in London, when she made her *début* there. Very likely you saw Mr. Robert Fortescue in London, Pansy?”

“Yes,” she answered, her heart beating fast and painfully.

“An exceedingly fine young man, Jenny says,” pursued Mrs. Cunliffe, “and only four-and-twenty. He is about to make a most excellent match—quite a wealthy alliance with the only child of a London banker. All the family are exceedingly pleased; but

you must not mention it to any living creature, for fear of bringing my poor Jenny into trouble."

"I shall never speak of it," said Pansy, rising abruptly from her chair. The colour flushed to her pale cheeks, and deepened into crimson as she met Diana's eyes. She crossed over to the sofa on which her stepmother was lying, and kissed her tenderly.

"I'm going away to old Fosse," she whispered; "don't let Mrs. Cunliffe come with me."

"Mrs. Cunliffe will stay with me," said Diana aloud; "and, Pansy, you call at the Vicarage, and bring Mr. Cunliffe back with you to dinner."

It was a grey day of autumn, with no break in the clouds, and no gleam of sunshine upon the sea. All the brightness seemed to have fled from the earth; and the green fields themselves looked dark and dull. The little village street, and the beach, and the strip of sand, were gathered into the same gloom. It was not cold, but Pansy shivered and trembled as she drew her cloak round her. She saw old Fosse at work in his garden, but she hurried swiftly past. If she could but bear up calmly till she was out of sight of every one,

she might give way to her sorrow and anguish when she was on the solitary rocks beneath the light-house.


Her girlish face wore a look of grey despair as she sped along the rough and narrow track. She felt no fatigue ; and the chill that made her shiver was not in the westerly wind. But as she turned the sharp corner of the lantern rock, beyond which she expected to be alone and unseen, she started to see the stone bench occupied by her father.

Justin's face was grey and sad like her own. He had heard that morning the news which he knew would pierce his daughter's heart ; and he had come to this spot to think over how he should break it to her. They stood looking at each other for a minute, and then, with a low heart-broken cry, Pansy ran to him and flung herself upon his breast.

"Father !" she cried, "father !"

"My darling !" he said.

"Am I very wicked ?" she sobbed. "I thought it would all come right somehow—and now it can never be right. Diana is very happy ; she never loved any one but you. Why did anybody ever think I should



be rich, and have Herford for my own? Father, I've lost everything."

"You have not lost me," he answered.

"Yes, I've lost you," she said vehemently. "I never thought there would be any one before me with you; and I grew up so. Oh! I am very wicked. Everything is changed or gone. I am living in a dream—a bad dream. There is Herford, and the same houses, and the same people; and yet they are all altered. They can never, never be the same as they used to be. You did not bring me up to bear with trouble, did you, father? And yet trouble will come."

"My darling! what can I do for you?" he asked.

"Nothing," she answered, "nothing; there is nothing can be done. Would you be very sorry if I died? I should choose to die, if you would not grieve too much."

"Pansy," he said, "it would well-nigh break my heart."


She lifted up her head, and looked at him with a brighter gleam in her blue eyes. She almost smiled as she gazed at his sorrowful face.

"That comforts me," she said, sighing; "and yet

I should be grieved if you were grieved. Father, I've tried to get better, and I cannot. I'm just like a pansy trodden under foot; you could never set it on its poor little stalk again. I thought the whole world was good and beautiful, and all at once I found out how cruel and bad it was. That crushed me down. I never was strong and brave; and when I found everybody was different from what I thought, it killed me. I've never been alive, as I used to be, since that time."

"Pansy," cried Justin, "if I lose you, my punishment will be more than I can bear."

"No, no," said Pansy; "it's all my fault, father. If I only had loved God more, He would have given me strength; and He will give you strength to bear it. You will be happy again without me some day. I think of it sometimes, as if I shall be living then, and see it. You will have other children, and they will love you as well as I do. You'll remember me, often and often, when they are looking up into your face, or watching for you coming home. They'll be merry and happy; but I could never be happy again. Oh, father; if I can, I'll come and look at you when you cannot see



me. And I'm not going to die directly," she said, smiling through her tears ; " we can talk about it often before I go. Perhaps God will let me live until your second child is born. But I shall always, always be your first-born ; I cannot lose that."

" Oh, my God ! " groaned Justin, " give me strength to bear it."

" Amen ! " said Pansy softly, and touching his cheek with her lips as she uttered the word.


They sat together a little while longer, talking no more, but grasping each other's hand fast, and thinking of the days gone by, in silence. At last Justin felt her slight frame shivering again, and he roused himself from his painful reverie. The greyness of the day was beginning to sink into the darkness of night ; and once more, possibly for the last time, he led his daughter homewards along the familiar pathway, and through the village where she had spent her happy girlhood.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE FULL PENALTY.

JUSTIN had at last been brought face to face with his secret dread. It had spoken to him through Pansy's own lips, sounding like an irrevocable doom. He could do nothing to avert it; for Pansy herself was yielding languidly to the grief that had been sapping her strength. The most skilful physicians of the county, and from London, were called in to prescribe for her, and she listened to their advice with a quiet and submissive smile, promising to do anything that they suggested; but none the less she was fading away from day to day.

It seemed as if she grew eager to gather up all the scattered interests and associations of her short life; for as long as she was strong enough she visited all the cottages and farmsteads about Herford, and spent her time, as she had been used to do, in the little village




and on the cliffs and beach. Old Fosse spent long hours with her in her favourite seat under the lighthouse ; and Justin sat beside them, for he could hardly bear to have Pansy out of his sight.

Presently the fancy took possession of her, as the weather kept her more indoors, that she must have her old companion and play-fellow, Jenny Cunliffe, to stay with her, as in the days of old. It looked like a caprice, but possibly there was some lurking hope in her heart that at last, before she died, a short spell of love, of repentance and forgiveness, might be given to her ; that Robert Fortescue might yet return, if he heard she was dying, for a little while to her side, and bring with him the brief rapture of a reconciliation. She could forgive him so tenderly, if he would only seek forgiveness ! Now she was so near the grave, no pride or bitterness mingled with her girlish love for him.

Mrs. Cunliffe demurred greatly about withdrawing Jenny from her situation as governess in Sir Robert Fortescue's household.

"It is so very excellent a position," she said to Diana ; "one we cannot expect Providence to offer to us again if we slight it now."



But Philip Cunliffe no sooner heard of Pansy's wish than he started off himself, in his shabbiest black coat, to fetch Jenny to Herford. When Lady Fortescue objected to the inconvenience of suddenly losing her governess, and said she must at once fill up that very desirable post, he assured her that no consideration on earth could prevail on him, or Jenny, to keep her away from her earliest and dearest friend. Lady Fortescue expressed her hope that Pansy's illness would be a short one, and promised to keep the situation open for a fortnight, if Jenny wished to return. There was no chance of her returning in a fortnight, so Jenny lost her first place, and on the whole was not sorry to lose it; though Mrs. Cunliffe did not forbear to bewail it in the ears of Justin and Diana, until she was assured that Jenny should lose nothing by devoting herself to Pansy.

Jenny entered upon her new duties buoyantly, and gossiped and prattled of the doings at Fortescue Hall, as she had been used to do about other subjects ever since Pansy and she had been children together. Pansy herself could not have told whether it was more pain or pleasure to her to hear these details. But to

Justin it was almost intolerable pain ; and he wondered how Pansy could listen, with her faint heart-breaking smile, and ask Jenny more questions, in the voice that was growing lower and weaker every day.

“ Is it quite settled that Richmond Fortescue is to be married soon ? ” she was inquiring one day, when Justin entered the room just as she finished her question, and Jenny answered it in her clear young voice.

“ Richmond ! His name is Robert, not Richmond, you know. He'll be Sir Robert when his father dies. Oh, yes ! they are to be married before Christmas, at the latest. Lady Fortescue is as proud as a peacock about it, and she is making the grandest preparations ! But I don't wish them joy. I wouldn't have married Mr. Robert, though I have not a penny for my fortune. Oh, Pansy ! what silly things we used to say about the persons we would marry ! ”

“ Why would you not marry him ? ” murmured Pansy.

“ Why ? ” said Jenny ; “ well, you know, we governesses see the other side, the poorer side of human nature. Mr. Robert Fortescue was very pleasant—oh, so pleasant !—when it was worth while, and he was on

show ; but he was not any hero at home. Now your father, or mine, never is on show ; so you will hardly understand it. He could be the poorest, meanest, smallest creature to those below him, or to those who could not oppose him. I would never have wasted a crumb of love on such a nature as his—— Why Pansy, what are you crying for ?”

“I wish I could get well and strong again !” she sobbed, stretching out her arms to her father, and leaning her head against him as he sat down beside her, “but it is too late now !”

It was too late. The fragile little flower, reared so delicately, and uprooted by so fierce and sudden a tempest, could not take root again, even in its native soil. She lost her last hold on life, as soon as she was convinced of the worthlessness of the man she had loved. Until now she had believed that it was no more a fault in his nature than in her own, which had separated them. But she grew more tranquil and happy when she had given up her last feeble hope. All she had known in her childhood were gathered about her ; her old friends were encircling her with vigilant kindness. Diana gave herself up to ministering to

her, aided by her clear, unselfish insight into the heart of the dying girl. As far as it is possible, the loneliness and bitterness of the path leading to the grave were removed for Pansy.

It was a short dark day, late in November, with thick mists hiding the sea, and drifting past the windows in clouds, that Justin found himself watching alone beside Pansy's bed. The room was the one where old Richard Herford had died many years before. It had not happened to Justin to be called upon to witness any death since that one, which had so materially influenced his life. The old carved cabinet, that had contained the dying man's two wills, was standing yet in its ancient place ; though the rest of the antique furniture had disappeared long ago. But Justin did not need any outward memento to put him in mind of his last vigil by a death-bed. As he sat where he could watch Pansy's white and quiet face, sleeping peacefully, he could not but recall the old man's withered troubled aspect, and his grey head tossing from side to side on his pillow. All the past rushed back upon him. He was once more the disappointed tempted man, into whose hand the coveted possession was thrust by chance.

Yet if he could but have looked on to the poignant anguish of this hour, as the final stage of the course into which he was drifting, not all the treasures upon earth could have prevailed upon him to enter upon it.

Jenny Cunliffe was spending the day at home, and Diana could not be with Pansy. He was alone with his daughter. Not his only child now, for a son had been born to him a week ago, the heir to the old Herford estates ; to bear the name, and hold the possessions for which he had paid so high a price. But there was no glow of pride or gladness in his heart. Though he resigned himself to the will of God, and bowed his head submissively to receive this last stroke, there was deep, inevitable, bitter pain in suffering it. For some days past these words had been haunting his brain—
“For he that knew his Lord’s will, and did it not, shall be beaten with many stripes.” Surely he ought to have known his Lord’s will, if ambition and covetousness had not blinded him.

“Father !” called Pansy, after a silence long and dreary to him, “father !”

“I am here, Pansy,” he answered.

"Are you quite, quite willing to let me go," she asked softly, "now you have another child?"


"'If it be possible,'" he cried, "'let this cup pass from me: nevertheless, not as I will, but as Thou wilt!'"

"Yes," she said; "and after the crucifixion came the resurrection; and after the resurrection the ascension; and then the glory. It must always be the cross first, father."

"Yes, my darling."

"It's only for a little while," sighed Pansy, "no one suffers always. You will learn to be content without me, father. How could you help being happy with Diana, and your other children? I want you to be happy again soon. I asked God to let me stay till baby was born; and see, He has let me live a little while longer, so that you might have both your children together. It is partly my own fault to die so young. Only I felt sick of life, and of this weary world, where everything seems to go wrong; and I did not wish to live. I'm not strong enough for this world, father. Did you never think so?"

"I thought I could shield you from every hardship," he answered.



"Father," she said, "if you could go back to when we came home from London—oh! what a happy time that was!—would you keep your secret still, for my sake? If you had known it would kill me, would you have given up Herford?"

"Yes, Pansy, yes!" he replied; "when I gave myself to God, I gave up all. Not to save you could I have kept my secret any longer. Believe me, I thought of your pain and grief a hundred times more than of my own; but I could not keep my brother out of his inheritance, and yet enter into the kingdom of heaven. If I had foreseen this very hour I should have done the same then."

"Old Fosse told me so," she said, with trembling lips. "Father, it is a good thing to love God more than all."

"And do you love God more than all?" asked Justin.

"I'm not very clever," said Pansy, "and it seems so far above me; I cannot understand. But of late I've felt as if I could understand how Jesus Christ loves us all. Perhaps He once knew a girl like me, neither strong nor wise; only a poor foolish little thing, spoiled and petted by everybody; and so He

knows what I am like, and what I want. He doesn't expect me to be like Diana. He's willing to take me as I am; and He has taken me—how I cannot tell you; but I'm not afraid any longer, and I'm not very sorrowful; and it all seems easy and smooth. I dream sometimes I'm in heaven; and it's something like Herford used to be, with everybody loving me, and everybody true to one another. If every one was only true!" she sighed.

Pansy's thin blue-veined eyelids fell, and her pale lips closed, as if she was tired of looking up at him and speaking to him. Justin stood beside her, gazing sorrowfully down upon the changed face; but thinking all the while of the other death he had witnessed in this room. The mysteries of the shrouded future were trooping around him again, with their insoluble problems. Pansy was soon to pass away from him, and he could do nothing but watch her till her foot struck against the invisible threshold. When, and where, and how would he see his child again? In what far-off unknown world would he meet once more this gentle and fragile spirit, so intimately bound up with his own?

"Are you here, father?" she cried suddenly, as if waking from her light slumber in some fear.

"Yes, Pansy," he answered, pressing her hand.

"I wish I had never been anything but a comfort to you," she said wistfully.

"You have always been dearer than my own life to me," he replied. "I cannot love Diana herself more than I have loved you."

"But differently," said Pansy, with a fleeting smile;—"there must be differences everywhere—even in loving. Only I did not understand it, and I felt alone. It seemed as if everything was changed. I could not think of Diana as my mother, though I loved her dearly, dearly. It was all strange, and I felt lonely. It was foolish of me to feel lonely."

"My darling!" exclaimed Justin, in a tone of profound grief.

"It was all my fault," she said, lifting her wasted hand to his face, as he bent over her, "and I was really glad you were happy, and I thanked God for it. But it was as if I was shut out, because I was not happy, and you were. It had never been so before. You seemed far away from me, in a sunny place, and


I could not anyhow climb up to the sunshine. I was in a dark, dark cell. At last it was because I learned to know more about Jesus Christ, and to believe in Him really—it was that brought me out of the darkness. I feel content now, father.”

“Content to leave me?” he asked.

“Yes,” she murmured. “I should never be good for much again, if I lived longer; I should be nothing but a faded sad little blossom, that could never be bright and light-hearted, as I used to be. It has all been too hard for me. Father, if you could ever in your life help Richmond—poor, poor fellow!—to grow true and good, oh! help him for my sake. You are sure to see him again, often; and then you’ll remember your little Pansy, and do all you can for him. His father is not a good man; and Richmond thinks so much of you.”

Pansy’s voice was very broken and low as she uttered her short sentences; but her shining eyes looked up eagerly into her father’s face.

“I shall remember you,” he answered, with some bitterness; “do you think I could ever see him without thinking of my darling?”




"That is enough," she said in a tone of contentment, as she drew his hand under her head, and nestled her thin white cheek upon it: "now I will keep myself quiet. I feel as if I should sleep very soundly to-night, and have nothing to fret about if I awake. Is it almost dark, dear father?"

"Almost," he replied, "for I can hardly see your face. We will have the lamp brought in soon, and I will read to you. To-morrow Diana will come to sit with you a little while."

"To-morrow!" she repeated softly, "to-morrow!"

The dim grey twilight of the misty November evening was fast deepening in the room, and filled all the corners with dark shadows; but the light from the nearest window fell full upon Pansy's dear face, and Justin could still see it lying on her hand, pale and worn, but restful, with closed eyes as if she was already half asleep. For two or three minutes she lay quite silent and motionless, and then a flush of colour spread over her wan cheek, and her blue eyes opened with an air of infinite surprise.

"Can I be dying?" she exclaimed in a tone of



solemn gladness; "it's neither dark nor lonely!
Can this be death, father?"


The last word fell from her lips in a low whisper, but her smile of gladness and surprise grew brighter. He felt the trembling pressure of Pansy's fingers, clasping his hand with a grasp more feeble than her baby fingers had been used to hold it when her little feet first trod the rough pathway of life at his side. The next moment Justin knew that God had taken her away into His own keeping.

CHAPTER XXV.

LAST WORDS.

RATHER more than two years after Pansy's death, one bright sunny day of February, when the winter winds were lulled for a little while, and the sea lay resting after its storms, Mrs. Cunliffe took the cliff-path to Rillage, to pay a visit to Mrs. Herford. A narrow road, yet wide enough for a light pony-carriage, had been made, with much trouble and considerable expense, between Rillage Grange and Herford Court, and daily communications were carried on between them.

Justin never missed finding time to see his brother every day, and it was seldom that Diana failed to do so when the weather was tolerably calm. But Mrs. Cunliffe was not driving; she was walking humbly on her own feet, as became the wife of a poor vicar whose income was too small for his large



family. The largeness of their family, and the smallness of their living, were subjects never absent from Mrs. Cunliffe's inner thoughts. For some months after Jenny had lost her situation as governess in Sir Robert Fortescue's household, her mother did not cease to lament the misfortune loudly and vehemently; and these lamentations were scarcely hushed even when the Bishop's lady engaged Jenny to educate her daughters; for what was the Bishop compared with Sir Robert Fortescue, the senior member for the county, and the largest landowner in their part of it? But this fine calm sweet February day, Mrs. Cunliffe for once was feeling that her strivings and mournings, her prudence and good management had at last been crowned with success. She was the proud bearer, if proud is the term to use for one so humble, of good news to her old friend Mrs. Herford.

At Rillage Grange she was ushered into a large light cheerful sitting-room adjoining Richard's bedroom. Richard had regained so much of physical strength, as to bear being lifted from his bed to a sofa, which could then be rolled into the next apartment; but he had no power to help himself. He lay in the

pleasant sunshine of the noon-day, an old man in appearance, with grey hair and sunken face. Diana was sitting beside him, and both of them were watching the frolics of Justin's boy, who came often to play for an hour or two in his uncle's sight. Richard's old social nature had not forsaken him, and he enjoyed seeing his quiet room peopled by friendly guests. He could not bear to be alone, and Leah took care that he should never be left in complete solitude. She was seldom away from him herself, and she was seated now where he could see her face, and appeal to her in a low voice whenever his memory failed him. For his mind was going, and the first faculty that failed him was the power of remembering slight unimportant things, lying a little outside of the narrow circle which hems in self. Very few had noticed this beginning of the direful end, but Leah was keenly awake to every change in him, and now she seldom left him herself, and always hastened back if she had been absent for a few hours.

Richard Herford was no longer unhappy. Of late he had fallen into the habit of assuring Justin each day that this was the happiest portion of his life.

Now and then he talked of old times to Leah, and expatiated on the adventures and changes of his earlier years ; but he looked back upon them as quite apart from himself, a wild career which had nothing to do with the present. A deep gulf lay between him and that past life, and he would not have passed across it if he could. The friendship of Diana and Justin, his own passionate love for the boy who was to be the future Herford of Herford, and above all his sense of reconciliation to God, filled up his heart, and gave to him a fulness of contentment such as he had never dreamed of in that far-off past which was growing more and more dim to his failing brain.

When Mrs. Cunliffe entered the sunny parlour she was very warmly greeted by Mrs. Herford, who was feeling neglected and overlooked by Richard and Diana, engrossed as they were by the little child. She was to the full as jealous of her grandson as she had been of Pansy, whose early death she was always bewailing to Justin as the greatest sorrow that had ever befallen her.

"I cannot get the thought of poor Pansy out of my head," she said in a doleful voice as soon as Mrs.

Cunliffe was seated, "she was such a sweet quiet child; the very opposite of Justin's boy. Those that knew them both as children must see an enormous difference. You never heard her make such a noise and racket as little Dick has been making all the morning. And I was twenty years younger then, and could have borne it better. Poor Pansy! we shall never see her like again."

"She was a sweet creature," remarked Mrs. Cunliffe, as Diana carried her boy away: "but, my dear Mrs. Herford, what a Providence it was for the son and heir! Miss Pansy would have wanted a large dowry, you know, and it would have been so much taken out of the estate. Mr. Richard likes to know he will be heir of all."

"Who is that woman?" Richard asked of Leah in a puzzled whisper.

"Mrs. Cunliffe," answered Leah; "you know the parson at Herford? His wife."

"Mrs. Cunliffe," spoke up Richard, "Justin and I would have Herford drowned in the depths of the sea to have little Heartsease back again."

"Ah! Mr. Richard," sighed Mrs. Cunliffe, "you

do not know what it is to have sons and daughters, and nothing to give them. Nobody knows that better than a poor vicar's wife. Somebody is always wanting something in a family like ours; but you rich folks have everything supplied you before you know you have need of it. Pansy would have been but a poor creature to push her way through the world, as my Jenny has had to do. But I have good news to tell you about Jenny, Mrs. Herford."

"Good news are scarce," said Mrs. Herford, in a tone suggesting much indifference to Jenny and her fortunes.

"You are quite right, dear Mrs. Herford," answered Mrs. Cunliffe, "especially in a little out-of-the-way vicarage like ours. I said so when Jenny's letter came: 'My dear Philip,' I said to my husband, 'now I can be thankful for once!' You'll agree with me when I tell you that Jenny is engaged to be married, with the Bishop's approbation, to one of his own nephews; a remarkably clever young man, with a living worth £600 per annum! That's something to be thankful for."

"Who is Jenny?" whispered Richard, with a shade of trouble on his face. "Do I know her?"

"Dear Miss Pansy's old playfellow," answered Leah. "She was with her when she was ill. And she was the first after me to bid you welcome home. You remember her?"

"Ay, I recollect now," he said, smiling; "what could I do without you, Leah?"

Leah's eyes were turned away from him to her sewing, for she did not wish him to see the tears starting in them, or the inward trouble showing itself on her face. He was growing more and more dependent upon her, but she knew now she could keep true to him to the end, whatever the end might be.

"It's good luck for Jenny," observed Mrs. Herford peevishly "I'm sure I never had such luck. My first husband was a poor man, and my second husband never thought much of me. Indeed, both of them neglected me; and so did my sons, especially Justin. Whatever he expects his own boy to grow up like, I don't know. He'll find out some day what a serpent's tooth is."

"I must be thinking of a wedding present for Miss Jenny," said Richard, who still delighted in being lavish at times. "Leah tells me she was the first,

next to her, to welcome me home. What does a young lady about to be married wish for most? I have no knowledge in such matters."

"Oh! my dear, good Mr. Richard," cried Mrs. Cunliffe, "any little token of regard would do. Of course," she continued anxiously, "we are poor people, and wedding gifts will be most acceptable, as Jenny is only a vicar's daughter. I daresay it would be a trouble to you to think of a suitable gift, and if you did not mind entrusting me with the money, however small it was, I could buy her something she needed, and tell her it was your gift, you know! I've been very near praying for her wedding-dress, this morning—it did come into my mind whilst I was saying my prayers—for I don't see where it is to come from, unless she wears simple white muslin, and nobody wears plain white muslin in these days."

"Let the wedding-dress be my present," said Richard, with an inward laugh noticed by no one except Leah Dart.

Mrs. Cunliffe rose in her rapture of gratitude and crossed the room to his side, an expression of reverential transport beaming on her face.

"You're too good, Mr. Richard—too good!" she exclaimed; "you do not know how much it will cost."

"Never mind the cost," he replied; "send in the bills to me, and don't be afraid of the cost. All Jenny's wedding finery shall come from me, and Leah shall go and see the wedding and tell me all about it."

"Jenny shall come to thank you herself," said Mrs. Cunliffe, with tears of real joy; "you cannot think how good people are! Your brother Justin gave Philip a hundred pounds towards the expenses; and old Fosse and his wife, who are the only persons beside that know about it, have promised to rear a brood of their famous chickens for poor Jenny. It is so pleasant to receive gratitude from the poor! Mrs. Fosse's chickens are as much, perhaps, from her, as Jenny's wedding-dress will be from you. Every one should give according to their means. I shall not tell Mr. Cunliffe, for he is so peculiar, you know. He is a very good man, but he has peculiar notions, and he really believes it is more blessed to give than to receive. Perhaps he would insist upon Jenny refusing your very handsome present."


"Perhaps he might," answered Richard with another inward chuckle.

"Yes," continued Mrs. Cunliffe, somewhat alarmed. "Oh! my dear Mr. Richard, it would double the value of your kindness if you would not mention it to my husband when he comes to see you. He is so very odd. I cannot make him understand how poor we are."

"But he accepted Justin's hundred pounds," said Richard.

"Mr. Justin can do what he pleases with him, as with everybody else," she replied. "Philip thinks no more of taking benefits from him than if they came direct from heaven. It was a happy day for Herford when he came back. Oh! Mr. Richard," she continued in a tone of vexation and dismay, "I'd forgotten whom I was talking to. Of course we'd rather have the rightful heir among us; but, after you, there's nobody like him."

"I thank God daily that Justin is at Herford," said Richard gravely. He closed his eyes, as if weary with talking, and Mrs. Cunliffe crept out of the room, silent and cast-down; with many an uneasy qualm lest he



should retract his promise, or mention it to her husband. But as neither of these hindrances occurred, she provided for Jenny a handsome and becoming dress, which helped to make her wedding the prettiest that had ever been celebrated in Herford church.

It was a day full of mournful memories, and of suggestions of what might have been, to Justin. Pansy's marble tablet shone new and white among the grey old monuments of the Herfords and the Lynns, erected in the chancel now filled with wedding-guests. What was it to him that he was Herford of Herford, whilst his first-born child had been the price paid for his ambition? He saw Diana gazing at him, with deep wifely sympathy and tenderness in her dark eyes; and his heart blessed her for it, but it was no less sad and troubled. When all was over, and he could separate himself from the other guests, he made his way alone to the bench under the lighthouse; and sat down there, his face buried in his hands, thinking.

He had entered in at the strait gate; he had gone through the needle's eye; and how strait and narrow it was, none knew better than he. His feet were

treading the highway through the wilderness, whereon the ransomed of the Lord walk. The kingdom of God was within him. There might be sadness, but there was no bitterness in the memory of Pansy. He would not have exchanged this hour, with all its sorrow, for any hour of his prosperous untroubled life, before he had given himself up to God. There was a true righteousness, a profound peace, an inward blessedness of spirit, which had not entered into his mind to conceive of in those days. He did not love his wife, and child, and lands less ; but he loved God more.

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